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K'taka urges Centre to scrap NEET-UG from 2026

Says Centre must allow states to conduct entrance exams

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Karnataka government on Saturday intensified its opposition to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), reiterating its demand that the Centre scrap the national medical entrance examination from the 2026 academic year and restore states' powers to conduct their own entrance tests.

Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru, Medical Education Minister Sharan Prakash Patil described the recent NEET paper leak as a "grave injustice" to students and accused the Centre of "sabotaging" the futures of aspiring doctors. He demanded the resignation of the concerned Union Minister and called for a court-monitored investigation, expressing little confidence in the ongoing CBI probe.

Patil alleged that the scandal appeared linked to the sale of MBBS seats and suggested that influential individuals were involved. He argued that Karnataka's Common Entrance Test (CET), conducted by the Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA), was a more transparent and merit-based model that should be adopted nationally.

Sharan Prakash Patil
—X/@S_PRAKASHPATIL

Karnataka's CET system had, for decades, enabled students from rural, middle-class and economically weaker backgrounds to secure professional education based on merit and academic consistency. In contrast, he said NEET had become associated with recurring allegations of paper leaks, impersonation, organised cheating, technical irregularities and inadequate accountability.

Karnataka's position mirrors long-standing opposition from several southern states, particularly Tamil Nadu, which argue that NEET disadvantages students from state boards by favouring the CBSE curriculum and expensive coaching centres. Critics also contend that the centralised examination undermines states' autonomy in education, disproportionately affects marginalised and rural students, and contributes to severe mental stress among aspirants.

Patil said medical admissions should be based on a system sensitive to regional and educational diversity rather than a "centralised model plagued by irregularities". He urged the Centre to respect the federal structure and allow states to conduct their own credible entrance examinations. Separately, the Karnataka government constituted a six-member Cabinet sub-committee to study and recommend implementation of the proposed State Education Policy.

Headed by Home Minister G Parameshwara, the panel will review the report submitted by the State Education Policy Commission led by Professor Sukhdeo Thorat and recommend reforms. *—PTI*

Biology lecturer behind NEET paper leak arrested
>>>More on Page 4

Deve Gowda accuses DKS of grabbing ryots' land

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Saturday alleged that farmers' lands are being grabbed for profiteering in the name of the 'Bidadi Township' project. He also announced that he would launch a fight against it. The JD(S) patriarch repeatedly targeted Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also the Minister for Bengaluru Development, without naming him. He was referring to the Rs 18,133 crore Greater Bengaluru Integrated Suburban Project at Bidadi in Bengaluru South district, which was approved in the 30 April Cabinet meeting. The project will cover 7,481 acres across Bengaluru and Ramanagara. *—PTI*

>>>MORE PN PAGE 2

Youth Congress chief detained over NEET protests

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) staged a protest demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over an alleged NEET-UG question paper leak. Activists, holding posters and banners, marched from Teen Murti Circle to the minister's residence before police stopped them. Several members, including IYC president Uday Bhanu Chib, were detained. The NEET-UG exam on 3 May was cancelled due to irregularities, with a re-test scheduled for 21 June. The protesters claimed the education system had "collapsed" under the BJP-led NDA government, alleging 89 papers had leaked in 12 years, including four NEET leaks, raising doubts about exam integrity. *—PTI*

Delhi slashes VAT on jet fuel from 25% to 7%

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Delhi government on Saturday reduced the value-added tax on aviation turbine fuel from 25 per cent to 7 per cent, officials said. "Delhi government has decided to reduce the value-added tax (VAT) on aviation turbine fuel (ATF) from the existing 25 per cent to 7 per cent, a move which is likely to benefit the airlines and common passengers," an official statement said. The decision was taken at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, it said. The move follows global fuel uncertainty arising from the ongoing conflict in West Asia. *—PTI*

Woman thrashed and paraded for remarks on deities

THANE, 16 MAY

Three people have been arrested after a woman was beaten, stripped and paraded with a garland of slippers in Ulhasnagar, Thane district. The incident, over a temple visit, occurred on Thursday after the woman allegedly made objectionable remarks about deities, angering a group. CCTV footage is being examined. Senior Inspector Sunil Awtade said, "The incident took place over a temple visit. The woman apparently made objectionable remarks about deities, which got a group of persons angry." The accused face charges including voluntarily causing hurt, criminal intimidation, and intentional insult under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The four other suspects are at large. *—PTI*

Centre appoints secretaries, directors in NTA

New Delhi: The Centre on Saturday appointed two each joint secretaries and joint directors in the National Testing Agency (NTA), which is under the heat over the NEET-UG paper leak. Anuja Bapat, a 1998-batch officer of Indian Statistical Service, and Ruchita Vij, a 2004-batch officer of Indian Revenue Service (Customs and Indirect Taxes), will be new joint secretaries in the NTA for five years, an order issued by the Personnel Ministry said. Akash Jain, an Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) officer, and Aditya Rajendra Bhojgadhiya, an Indian Audit and Accounts Service officer, have been named joint directors in the NTA, the ministry said in a separate order. *—PTI*

'NULL AND VOID'

India has maintained that the Indus Water Treaty will remain in abeyance until Pakistan stops sponsoring cross-border terrorism *—PTI*

Indus Treaty: India bins CoA ruling backing PaK

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

India has rejected the latest decision of the Court of Arbitration on the Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan, calling it "null and void."

Terming the Court of Arbitration (CoA) as an "illegally constituted" body, a statement from the Ministry of External affairs said that India categorically rejects the present so-called award, just as it has firmly rejected all prior pronouncements of the illegally constituted CoA.

"The illegally constituted so-called has, on 15 May 2026, issued what it termed an award concerning maximum pondage supplemental to the award on issues of general interpretation of the Indus Waters Treaty. India categorically rejects the present so-called award, just as it has firmly rejected all prior pronouncements of the illegally constituted CoA," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) A spokesperson from the MEA Randhir Jaiswal said in a statement that "India has never recognised the establishment of this so-called CoA, and any proceeding, award, or decision issued by it is null and void. India's decision to hold the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance remains in force."

India has maintained that the Indus Water Treaty will remain in abeyance until Pakistan stops sponsoring cross-border terrorism. The decision was taken in April 2025 after 26 people were killed in a terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam.

India has objected to the constitution of a CoA to resolve disputes over the Indus waters, calling the body illegal and asking for a "neutral expert" to solve the differences between the two countries. *—Agencies*

CBSE makes 3-language compulsory for Class 9

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made the study of three languages compulsory for Class 9 students from 1 July, 2026, in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

According to a circular issued by the board, students must study three languages — R1, R2 and R3 — with at least two being native Indian languages. Foreign languages may only be chosen as the third language after studying two Indian languages, or as an optional fourth language.

To reduce academic pressure, CBSE said there will be no board examination for the third language (R3) at the Class 10 level. Instead, assessments will be entirely school-based and internal, though performance will still be reflected in the CBSE certificate. The board clarified that no student will be barred from appearing for Class 10 board examinations due to R3.

Schools have been directed to update their language offerings for Classes 6 to 9 on the OASIS portal by June 30.

The board also allowed interim measures for schools facing shortages of language teachers, including virtual teaching and inter-school resource sharing. Relaxations will be available for children with special needs, while foreign students returning to India may receive exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

Earlier, CBSE had also announced a two-level system for mathematics and science from the 2026–27 academic session.. *—PTI*

EC orders probe into voting by foreigners in TN

CHENNAI, 16 MAY

The Election Commission has ordered a probe into allegations that foreign nationals "deceitfully" voted in the 23 April Tamil Nadu Assembly election, following the arrest of ten individuals in Chennai, officials said on Saturday.

According to police, the action was taken after airport officials noticed indelible ink on the index fingers of several passengers attempting to board flights and alerted authorities. Subsequent checks led to the detention of ten foreign nationals across nine cases at Chennai and Madurai airports.

Investigators said the individuals were from Sri Lanka, the United Kingdom and Canada. Police alleged they had used fraudulent Indian identity documents to cast votes in the Tamil Nadu polls.

The Chennai Police Central Crime Branch has registered cases and is continuing its probe. *—PTI*

PM talks innovation, tech with Dutch royals

THE HAGUE, 16 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday met Dutch King Willem-Alexander and Queen Máxima at the Royal Palace in The Hague, where both sides discussed expanding cooperation in technology, innovation, sustainability and maritime sectors.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the leaders reviewed growing India–Netherlands ties and highlighted collaboration in digital technology, fintech, climate action and the blue economy. They also reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations.

Modi is visiting the Netherlands from May 15 to 17 on the second leg of his five-nation tour, which also includes the UAE, Sweden, Norway and Italy.

The Netherlands is among India's largest trading partners in Europe, with bilateral trade reaching USD 27.8 billion in 2024–25. It is also India's fourth-largest foreign investor, with cumulative FDI of USD 55.6 billion.

Earlier, Modi addressed the Indian diaspora in The Hague, describing India as a "land of opportunities" undergoing an "unprecedented transformation". *—PTI*

Gig workers go on strike amid fuel price hike

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Gig and Platform Service Workers Union (GPSWU) called for a five-hour nationwide shutdown of app-based services on Saturday , from 12 pm to 5pm, to protest rising fuel costs and demand a minimum rate of Rs 20 per kilometre for delivery and transport work.

The union reported an estimated 60 per cent participation among platform-based workers across India.

GPSWU estimates nearly 1.2 crore gig and platform workers could be directly affected by the fuel price hike. The shutdown disrupted food delivery, ride-hailing, logistics, and other app-based services, with platforms such as Swiggy, Zomato, and Blinkit likely to have been impacted during the five-hour window.

The shutdown disrupted food delivery, ride-hailing, and other app-based services on Swiggy, Zomato, and Blinkit *—PTI*

The union urged the central and state governments, as well as digital platform companies, to implement immediate relief measures, including a minimum per-kilometre rate and other compensatory adjustments. It also called on platforms to adopt emergency support measures amid rising costs.

The union warned it would escalate if its demands were not addressed immediately. GPSWU also announced that a large-scale protest will be organised at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi in the coming days.

The Centre on Friday announced an increase of Rs 3 per litre in petrol and diesel prices with immediate effect, the first revision in retail fuel rates in nearly four years. The hike continuing instability across West Asia, particularly over disruptions in the strategically crucial Strait of Hormuz. *—Agencies*

FOR 4 MONTHS

Unable to pay Rs 2,000 rent, Gujarat man lets landlord rape wife, daughter

MORBI, 16 MAY

A man from Morbi district in Gujarat has been arrested for allegedly striking a deal with his landlord to let him repeatedly rape his wife and minor daughter in lieu of the rent owed to the landlord.

According to a case filed at the local police station, the accused who belonged to Surendranagar in Gujarat had relocated to Morbi around six months ago with his family consisting of his wife and a minor daughter in search of a livelihood.

The family had found an accommodation with a monthly rent of Rs 2,000.

However, they faced severe financial hardship, due to which they were unable to pay the rent for the last four months.

The accused then struck a deal with the landlord to let him (the landlord) sexually abuse the accused's wife and minor daughter in lieu of the pending rent amount.

The abuse came to light when the women mentioned about it to her mother who then lodged a complaint with the Morbi police station. Following this a case of rape was filed against the landlord along under stringent legal provisions, including the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. *—PTI*

Govt launches 20 days Hajj package

KOCHI, 16 MAY

The Centre on Saturday announced the launch of a short Hajj package for Indian pilgrims, particularly professionals, aimed at reducing the pilgrimage duration for around 10,000 pilgrims this year. Under the new arrangement, pilgrims will be able to complete the Hajj rituals and return within around 20 days, instead of the usual extended stay.

The initiative has been introduced as per the request of pilgrims working in business and professional sectors who find it difficult to spend 40 to 45 days away from work, said George Kurian from the office of Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs.

The minister's office said the first flight is scheduled to depart from Kochi on 17 May, with other departures planned from major cities including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Ahmedabad.

The short Hajj package will run from 17 May to 5 June.

His office said the move is intended to make the pilgrimage more accessible and manageable for working professionals. *—PTI*

— X@SIDDARAMAIAH

Sikhs also benefit from scrapping ban on hijab: CM

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah stated on Saturday the Congress government's decision to scrap the 2022 order popularly known as the "hijab ban" benefits Sikhs as well. In a post on X, Siddaramaiah stated that members of the community had met to express their gratitude, because the Congress had permitted faith based symbols to be displayed in school. As a result, members of the Sikh community could wear their turban to school. "Our resolve to transform the State into a garden of communal harmony is not mere lip service; we are literally committed to our word by conducting ourselves with equal respect for the religious beliefs of all faiths," he said. —*SALAR NEWS*

BSWML launches 'DClutter' app for bulky waste

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Bengaluru Solid Waste Management Limited (BSWML) has launched 'DClutter' mobile app for doorstep collection of bulky waste such as old furniture, mattresses, cupboards, sanitary fittings and discarded clothes in Bengaluru. Such waste was often dumped on roadsides as it was not covered under regular collection. During a pilot drive, BSWML collected nearly 6,000 tonnes of bulky waste. Citizens can use the Android and iOS app to register, select items & schedule pickups for scientific recycling. Meanwhile, the remaining non-recyclable materials will be transported to a Waste-to-Energy plant for further processing and disposal. The bulky waste will be collected once a week, depending on the quantity and nature of waste generated.—*SALAR NEWS*

10L illegal B'deshis in State: LoP backs SIR

Says can show the tents where they live in Mahadevapura, Kodagu, Chikkamagaluru

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

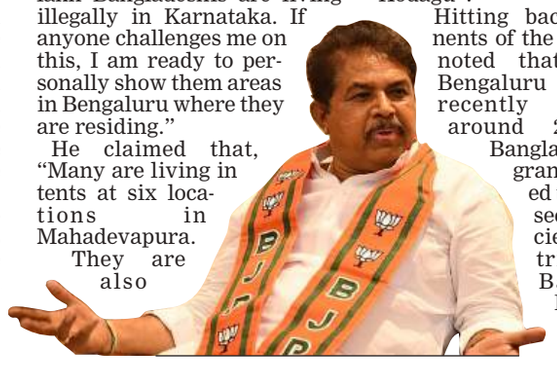
Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, R Ashoka, defended the upcoming SIR process, claiming that there were more that 10 lakh Bangladeshi citizens living "illegally" in Karnataka.

Speaking to reporters in the City on Saturday, Ashoka said that the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which is slated to begin on 20 June in the State and cover more that 5.55 crore electors, aims to eliminate bogus voters and serves the national interest and security.

"Some Muslim organisations have made remarks opposing the SIR. (But) There are over 2 crore illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India," Ashoka said.

He conceded that "most of them live in West Bengal, followed by Assam and Bihar." But there are "more than 10 lakh Bangladeshis are living illegally in Karnataka. If anyone challenges me on this, I am ready to personally show them areas in Bengaluru where they are residing."

> **Congress leaders, including (Housing) Minister Zameer Ahmed Khan, claim there is not even a single illegal Bangladeshi immigrant in the State, but the reality is different.**
>
> -R Ashoka, BJP leader



He claimed that, "Many are living in tents at six locations in Mahadevapura. They are also employed in large numbers at lower wages in coffee plantations in Chikkamagaluru and Kodagu".

Hitting back at opponents of the exercise, he noted that that the Bengaluru Police had recently identified around 250 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants and handed them over to security agencies for repatriation to Bangladesh. He added that they were flown from Bengaluru to the border at a cost of Rs 65 lakh. "It happened in the last month or so".

Questioning "why fear the SIR", he said: "All Indians, whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian, have the right to vote. If anything goes wrong in the process, there is a right to appeal. The Congress is in power in Karnataka, and Congress has agents in every booth, just like the BJP and JD(S)."

On Friday, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar alleged that the SIR of electoral rolls was being implemented to "cut" the votes of Scheduled Castes, Backward Classes, and minorities and the ruling Congress government in the state would ensure that these communities were "protected". —*PTI*

Extend SIR period by 1yr, note changes in State: Cong MLC to CEO

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Congress MLC Ramesh Babu urged the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) to extend the SIR process by one year in Karnatak and urged Election Commission (ECI) to consider the various changes that the State has undergone since the last time the rolls were revised "to ensure that no eligible voters are removed in the name of revision".

In a letter to the CEO on Saturday, Babu noted that the last time the SIR had been conducted was 21 years ago. Babu stated that several constituencies no longer exist in their previous form due to the 2008 delimitation in Karnataka. Hence, "voters whose names do not correspond with the 2002 electoral rolls during the mapping process must be protected".

He also claimed that the ECI has "not provided convincing reasons for" conducting the SIR now, especially given the onset of crucial elections. —*Salar News*

The government has begun supplying water to tankers to affected villages in Chamarajanagar —*SALAR*

CHAMARAJANAGAR TO BE DECLARED AS DROUGHT HIT?

MYSURU, 16 MAY

The Chamarajanagar administration has submitted a proposal to the State government to declare the district as drought hit, said State Animal Husbandry, Veterinary Sciences, Sericulture Minister K Venkatesh on Saturday.

Venkatesh, who is also the district in-charge minister, told reporters at Hanur taluk that Deputy Commissioner Sri Rupa has sent the report after collecting details including depleting ground water levels, crop loss, worsening drinking water crisis, and a scarcity of rains.

Notably, at least 45 villages of Hanur taluk alone were identified as having a drinking water crisis.

The district administration has already begun supplying drinking water through tankers to most affected villages.

He hoped that that the State government would soon take a decision to declare the district as drought hit, and then take up relief measures.

He said he had discussed the same with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

—*Salar News*

WRITES TO RAGA, CM, SONIA

Bidadi township is DKS' land mafia: Deve Gowda

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Former prime minister and JD(S) National President HD Deve Gowda on Saturday alleged that a powerful "land mafia" is actively operating in the State under political patronage, criticising the Bidadi Integrated Township project, and announced that he would launch a fight against it.

The former chief minister said that he has written to Congress top brass Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah over the issue, "but unfortunately, Siddaramaiah is unable to take steps because the other side is holding the powerful portfolio".

"Having so much of a relationship with the people of that area, it pains me to see how the five corporations have been formed by the present government at the behest of the Congress," Deve Gowda said.

Without explicitly naming Deputy Chief Minister and Bengaluru Development Minister DK Shivakumar, Deve Gowda targeted him over the restructuring of the regional development authorities. "I don't want to take his name. He is the Irrigation Minister. The five corporations are also under his control. This is how the land mafia is working."

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda —*PTI*

> **Siddaramaiah, you have worked with me. I know your commitment to social justice. I have written to you for an investigation into whose names around 20,000 acres of land around Bengaluru are registered under. But you are yielding to pressure from those in charge of Bengaluru... This is the time to take a stand. Don't bow to pressure. The farmers of Bidadi are in tears**
>
> -HD Deve Gowda, Former CM and PM

The project will cover about 7,481 acres across nine villages in Bengaluru South district and Ramanagara taluk.

Deve Gowda claimed that even Siddaramaiah is constrained by internal Cabinet dynamics.

The affected villages included Byramangala, Hosur and Kanchakarahalli in the Bidadi region of the erstwhile Ramanagara Assembly constituency. Ramanagara was a JD(S) stronghold.

Earlier, Deve Gowda's son and Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy had called the Rs 18,133 crore project a "real estate scam" that was grabbing fertile agricultural land from farmers.

Shivakumar rejected Kumaraswamy's charges, claiming that the JD(S) second-in-command himself started the project. He said that he wasn't afraid if farmers hit him, as "20 years from now, the people of Bidadi and South Bengaluru will remember me". —*Agencies*

State gets 1,122 more medical seats in colleges

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The State has been allocated an additional 1,122 government medical seats, providing a significant boost for aspiring healthcare professionals, announced Minister Sharan Prakash Patil. Addressing a press conference at Vidhana Soudha, Patil, who is the Minister for Medical Education, stated that State remains a leader in medical education nationally. The extra seats will benefit districts including Koppal, Gadag, Chamarajanagar, Karwar, Kaveri, and others across the State

He explained that the central government will provide a grant of Rs 495 crore for undergraduate seats and Rs 541 crore for postgraduate medical seats. The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare approved the allocation on 15 May, with the total funding amounting to Rs 1,090 crore.

Patil described the allocation of over 1,000 medical seats to a single State as a record achievement, highlighting Karnataka's accomplishments. He said the State "offers abundant opportunities for those wishing to excel in the medical field." —*PTI*

One Nation, One Election is unworkable, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday strongly opposed the central government's proposed 'One Nation One Election' (ONOE) initiative, calling it "not a workable plan that is practically impossible".

Speaking at a dialogue on the 'One Nation One Election' organised by the Joint Parliamentary Study Committee, he said the plan is a politically motivated, power-centralising scheme that would seriously damage India's federal structure by weakening states and poses a threat to the democratic system, according to a statement from his office.

The KPCC said he categorically rejected the proposal, stating that it is being crafted to suit the convenience of those in power at the Centre.

"If a government falls midterm due to political instability, a no-confidence motion, or loss of majority, what is the solution?" he asked.

Shivakumar noted that the State Legislative Assembly had already passed a resolution opposing ONOE and read out the resolution at the meeting.

Congress national spokesperson MV Rajeev Gowda, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and Law Minister HK Patil at the Joint Parliamentary Study Committee, in Bengaluru, on Saturday —*PTI*

- The Centre's One Nation, One Election proposal seeks to have simultanesous elections in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies, and local bodies to 'reduce expenditures'

"Elections are held at different times in different states for different terms. Karnataka had its election in 2023, while Tamil Nadu and Kerala had theirs in 2021, and Punjab and Telangana in 2022 and 2023, respectively. How can these elections with varying schedules be synchronised?" he added.

He claimed that the proposal is a ploy to suppress the voices of regional and Opposition parties. He said the State government remains committed to the position of the Congress party's national leadership. —*PTI*

6 loot gold, silver worth Rs 40 lakh from Haveri shop

HAVERI, 16 MAY

Six men with covered faces allegedly broke into a jewellery shop and decamped with gold and silver articles worth over Rs 40 lakh in this district in the wee hours of Saturday, police said.

The theft occurred at a jewellery shop in Chikkanshihosur village in Hanagal taluk of Haveri district between 1.45am and 2.30am, they said.

After gaining entry by cutting open both shutters, they covered three of the four CCTV cameras installed inside the shop and decamped with a safe locker. However, their act was recorded on one CCTV camera that was not covered.

Citing preliminary investigations, a senior police officer said 19 kg of silver items worth Rs 21 lakh and 219 grams of gold ornaments worth Rs 22 lakh were stolen from the shop. "We have some clues about the vehicle used to transport the stolen jewellery, and efforts are underway to trace the vehicle and nab the suspects involved in the theft," a police official said. A case of theft has been registered, he said. —*PTI*

CID to take over multi crore ponzi scam probe

BELAGAVI, 16 MAY

The owner of Shivam Associates, a private investment firm Shivanand Neelannavar, was detained following a crackdown on suspected multi-crore investment fraud and unregulated financial activities, officials confirmed Saturday. Neelannavar was taken into custody for further investigation. The Belagavi district administration and police uncovered the suspected scam, alleging the firm collected funds from thousands of investors without approvals from RBI or SEBI.

The case has been handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) due to the scale and interstate nature of the case.

Addressing a joint press conference, Belagavi Police Commissioner Borase Bhushan Gulabrao, said about 35,000 people invested, with the total amount involved suspected to be at least Rs 50 crore, but exact figures await detailed audit.

Authorities said the alleged scam has ramifications across several districts of Karnataka as well as neighbouring Maharashtra.

Arrestted Shivanand Neelannavar in Belagavi, on Saturday —*PTI*

Thousands of investors, including farmers, retired employees, and ex-servicemen, were reportedly lured into the scheme with promises of annual returns of nearly 36 per cent.

Gulabrao added that the owner was secured and would be produced before court, with police seeking custody for further probing. Investigators suspect that the firm operated a pyramid-style Ponzi scheme by offering unusually high returns to depositors, but the structure has now collapsed. —*Salar News*

STRONG FY '25-26 GROWTH

KIA crosses 400M passenger milestone

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

The Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) in April crossed the 400 million passenger milestone since commencing operations, officials said on Saturday.This was noted at the 134th BIAL Board Meeting, chaired by Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, during a review of the company's key achievements, performance highlights, and developmental initiatives for FY 2025–26.

During FY 2025–26, BLR Airport handled 44.47 million passengers (up 6.2 per cent year-on-year) and 532,000 metric tonnes of cargo. Growth was driven by steady domestic demand and strengthening cargo operations, but led primarily by a 23.9 per cent surge in international traffic to 7.23 million passengers. Domestic traffic grew 3.3 per cent to 37.24 million passengers.

During FY 2025–26, BLR Airport handled 44.47 million passengers and 532,000 metric tonnes of cargo —*PTI*

"This performance, despite geopolitical and sectoral headwinds, reflects Bengaluru's increasing global relevance as a business and innovation hub. BLR Airport currently offers non-stop connectivity to more than 78 domestic and 34 international destinations," the statement said.

BLR Airport's cargo business maintained steady growth, handling 532,000 metric tonnes — up 6 per cent year-on-year — supported by 15 cargo airlines operating across 38 destinations, connecting Bengaluru to key global hubs including Chicago, Singapore, London Heathrow, Frankfurt, Shenzhen, and Hong Kong. Average daily movements stood at 769, with a single-day peak of 837. Passenger traffic also hit a record, with 139,111 passengers handled in a single day, officials said.

The airport also improved its position in the Skytrax World Top 100 Airports rankings from 48th to 41st place and received Level 5 Customer Experience Accreditation and Level 3 Accessibility Accreditation from Airports Council International. —*PTI*

If CM wants PM to resign, he should too: BYV on fuel hike

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

State BJP President BY Vijayendra on Saturday said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar should have resigned two years ago if they expect Prime Minister Narendra Modi to step down over the recent fuel price hike.

Siddaramaiah had condemned the Rs 3 hike on petrol and diesel, holding Modi directly responsible, and demanding the PM's resignation.

"Does the Congress and other Opposition parties in the country not know why the petrol and diesel prices are increasing?" Vijayendra told press.

He said that the Congress had previously hiked taxes on petrol and diesel prices in the State without any reasons.

State BJP President BY Vijayendra takes a Metro on Saturday after PM Modi's austerity call —*SALAR*

"They have done it four to five times. How many times, then, should Siddaramaiah have resigned? Considering the situation globally and in the country, and the distress situation looming globally, the Prime Minister has advised certain things." He also dismissed claims that the price hike was delayed until the conclusion of polls. —*PTI*

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Court grants bail to Vadra in Haryana land deal case

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Businessman Robert Vadra, after being granted bail in a PMLA case linked to the Shikohpur land deal, stated he had "nothing to hide" and accused the Enforcement Directorate (ED) of functioning under government influence. Vadra emphasised his faith in the judiciary and said, "The ED will keep on going on the instructions of the Government. I have nothing to hide." He added he was "fearless" and prepared to face proceedings. Vadra appeared before the Rouse Avenue Court regarding the case, which involves transactions from 2008-2012, including the sale of land to DLF. The ED alleges the scheme involved proceeds of crime, with further i nvestigation ongoing. Vadra's legal team argued some charges were added later, and the court scheduled further hearings on Monday. *—ANI*

—ANI

Ex Punjab minister Surjit Singh Rakhra joins AAP from SAD

PATIALA, 16 MAY

Former Punjab minister Surjit Singh Rakhra joined the AAP on Saturday before Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. Rakhra had been one of the more prominent faces of the Shiromani Akali Dal for many years. During the previous Akali governments, he handled such important ministries as revenue and rehabilitation and was considered among the close confidants of former CM Parkash Singh Badal. Due to differences, particularly with Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal, Rakhra joined the Shiromani Akali Dal (Punar Surjit). The Giani Harpreet Singh-led breakaway faction later expelled Rakhra for "anti-party" activities. Rakhra is a two-time MLA from the Samana Assembly, currently represented by AAP legislator Chetan Singh Jouramajra. *—PTI*

Man arrested for threatening WB CM via email

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

Hasnain Iqbal, 27, was arrested in Kolkata's Garden Reach after allegedly sending an email to police threatening a suicide attack on West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari, implicating terror outfit Al Qaeda. The email was received by Bhowanipore police on 14 May at 10.15am, claiming that a suicide attack would be carried out with Al Qaeda's help. The police traced the email to Iqbal, who later admitted to sending it during questioning. The investigation suggested the email was sent using a woman's identity, possibly to harass or implicate her and her family. Officials also found that Iqbal had previously sent emails to government institutions, including the Election Commission, using advanced IT skills. Further probe continues. *—PTI*

Maratha quota activist Jarange threatens new stir

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange announced an indefinite hunger strike from 30 May, giving the Maharashtra government until 29 May to distribute Kunbi caste certificates in Marathwada. Jarange demanded the dissolution of the quota sub-committee, and called for a separate ministry for Maratha and Kunbi communities. He accused CM Devendra Fadnavis of halting the issuance of Kunbi certificates accusing. Jarange urged immediate implementation of the Hyderabad gazette, validation of existing certificates, and dropping cases against protesters. Jarange seeks recognition of Marathas as Kunbis for reservation benefits. *—PTI*

Vijay allocates portfolios, keeps Home

Sengottaiyan named Finance Minister; Aadhav Arjuna will take care of public works

CHENNAI, 16 MAY

In his maiden government, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay will handle key portfolios including police, general administration and welfare of women, youth and children, while veteran leader K A Sengottaiyan has been designated as the Finance Minister, the Lok Bhavan said on Saturday.

By keeping Home for himself, Vijay continues the trend of Chief Ministers in TN retaining the important portfolio with themselves.

The portfolios for all the 10 ministers, including Vijay, were approved by Governor Rajendra Viswanath Arlekar as per the recommendation of the chief minister, a Tamil Nadu Lok Bhavan press release said.

C Joseph Vijay, N Anand, Aadhav Arjuna, KG Arunra, R Nirmalkumar, KA Sengottaiyan, S Keerthana, TK Prabhu, P Venkataramanan, Rajmohan *—PTI*

- By keeping Home for himself, Vijay continues the trend of Chief Ministers in TN retaining the important portfolio with themselves. Meanwhile, The remaining portfolios for all the 10 ministers, including Vijay, were approved by Governor Rajendra Viswanath Arlekar.

The portfolio allocations came a week after the council of ministers led by Vijay was sworn in on 10 May.

According to the Lok Bhavan, Vijay will handle public, general administration, police, women and youth welfare, welfare of children, aged, differently abled persons, municipal administration and urban and water supply.

N Anand was designated minister for rural development and water resources. Aadhav Arjuna will take care of public works (buildings, highways and minor ports) and sports development. K G Arunraj will be the minister for health, medical education and family welfare, the release said.

P Venkataramanan has been allocated Food and Civil Supplies, while R Nirmalkumar will handle Energy Resources and Law.

Rajmohan shall be the Minister for School Education, Tamil Development, Information and Publicity.

TK Prabhu will handle the portfolios of Natural Resources, Minerals and Mines while S Keerthana will take over as minister for industries, the release added. *—PTI*

No rift: Satheesan meets Venugopal

T'PURAM, 16 MAY

Kerala Chief Minister-designate VD Satheesan on Saturday met senior Congress leader KC Venugopal at his residence here and dismissed reports of differences between them, even as discussions on cabinet formation continued.

Satheesan also met senior leader Ramesh Chennithala, who was in the race for the CM's post, before visiting Venugopal's residence.

Satheesan arrived at Venugopal's residence at around 1.30 pm, was received by the the Alappuzha MP and the two held separate discussions in the living room for over 45 minutes.

Later, both leaders later addressed a joint press conference. Venugopal said differences of opinion were natural in a political party. "Once the party takes a decision, our aim is to stand firmly by it and fight for it," he said adding, "As a Congressman, it is my responsibility to extend full support to him,".

Congress MP KC Venugopal & Kerala CM-designate VD Satheesan speak to the media in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday *—PTI*

Satheesan said the two shared a long association and had travelled extensively together.

"We do everything after consulting each other…There is no issue that cannot be resolved if we sit together... Sometimes he may be right, and sometimes I may be right. We correct each other mutually," he added.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala, who had expressed dissatisfaction over not being chosen for the CM's post, said he always remained an obedient Congressman, amid ongoing cabinet formation talks in Kerala.

He was speaking to reporters after meeting AICC general secretary K C Venugopal at his residence here. *—PTI*

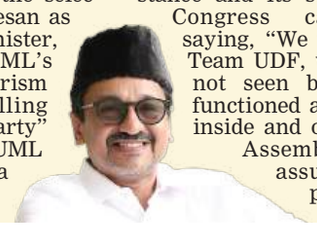
Cong leader likens CM row to labour pain

Congress leader T Siddique on Saturday said the issues over the CM's post would be resolved amicably, comparing the it to labour pain. Siddique said all issues would be effectively settled by the CM-designate and party leadership. To a query about the dissent by senior leader Ramesh Chennithala over being denied the Chief Minister's post, he said, "Every issue will be resolved after discussions...There will be discussions and planning to resolve the issue. It is an attempt to ensure the birth of a good child." *—PTI*

IUML expects five cabinet berths, says Thangal

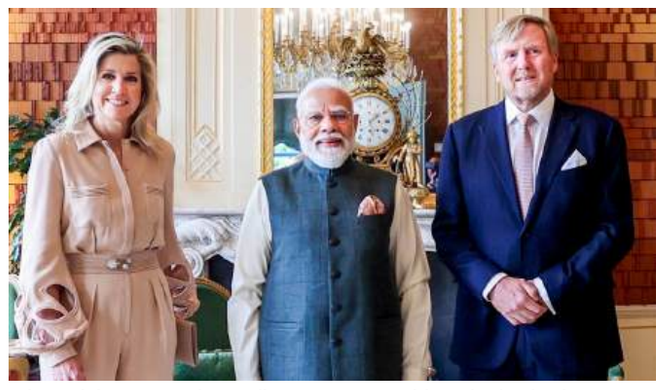
KOZHIKODE, 16 MAY

IUML leader **Sayyid Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal** stated that while the party has not formally claimed cabinet positions, it expects to secure five berths in Kerala's upcoming government. Thangal said, "We expect that in the final decision, all aspects will be taken into account," adding that IUML, the second-largest UDF ally with 22 seats, played a vital role in the election victory. He also defended the selection of V D Satheesan as the next Chief Minister, emphasising IUML's support for secularism and unity, calling IUML a "brother party" and stating, "If IUML weakens, Kerala itself would be at risk."



UDF leader Satheesan praised IUML's secular stance and its support for Congress candidates, saying, "We worked as Team UDF, which was not seen before. We functioned as one unit inside and outside the Assembly." He assured that portfolio sharing discussions had been completed and details would be announced soon.

Meanwhile, former CPI(M) leader G Sudhakaran, elected as a UDF-backed independent, stated he would not seek a ministerial berth but would accept one if offered. He said, "Nobody has spoken to me about it," and added he would attend the swearing-in ceremony. *—PTI*



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, centre, poses with Netherlands King Willem-Alexander, right, and Queen Maxima during a meeting in Amsterdam, Netherlands *—PTI*

India's aspirations now beyond borders: PM in Netherlands

THE HAGUE, 16 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi described India as a "land of opportunities" and said the country is undergoing an "unprecedented transformation", with aspirations "no longer limited to its borders". Addressing the Indian community in The Hague, Modi stated, "India of the 21st century is a land of opportunities. India is both technology-driven and humanity-driven. India is becoming as modern as it is ancient."

He urged friends of India in the Netherlands to boost cooperation, promising, "This will increase India's potential, and your investment returns will be higher. This is Modi's guarantee." Modi highlighted India's ambition to host the Olympics, become a global manufacturing hub, lead in green energy, and be the world's growth engine.

He mentioned India's successful moon landing and the rise from four to nearly 125 unicorns, saying, "Our start-ups are doing remarkable work in AI, defence, and space." He praised India's democracy, noting high voter turnout and increased women's participation, calling India the "Mother of Democracy".

Modi also called the Netherlands a "natural gateway" for Indian businesses into Europe. He stressed global challenges, cooperation on green hydrogen, and described India and the Netherlands' shared values, symbolised by the lotus and tulip. Modi's tour includes Sweden, Norway, and Italy. *—PTI*

Bhojshala verdict: AIMPLB to move SC

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) on Saturday said it will challenge the Madhya Pradesh High Court verdict in the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula mosque dispute in the Supreme Court, alleging that the judgment is contrary to historical evidence and the Constitution.

The board said the ruling also violates the spirit of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. It strongly rejected the court's decision declaring the Bhojshala complex in Dhar district as a temple dedicated to Goddess Saraswati and quashing a 2003 arrangement allowing Hindus pray on Tuesdays and Muslims to offer namaz on Fridays.

AIMPLB spokesperson SQR Ilyas said the judgment ignored historical documents, colonial records, gazetteers and the long-standing religious association of Muslims with the site. He added that even the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) had earlier recognised its shared character and permitted a dual worship arrangement.

The Madhya Pradesh High Court bench of Justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi ruled that the site is a protected monument and held that its religious character is that of a Saraswati temple, citing scientific evidence.

The court also directed the Centre and ASI to manage the site and said the Muslim side could seek alternative land for a mosque. It further suggested considering the return of Goddess Saraswati's idol from the London Museum for reinstatement at the site. *—PTI*

'FAMILY PLANNING'

Andhra CM promises cash incentives for 3rd, 4th child

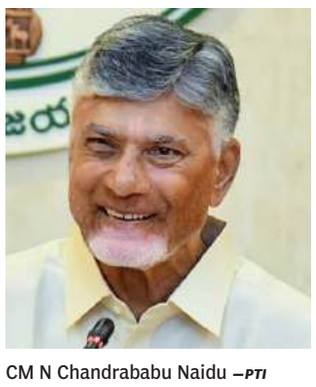
NARASANNAPETA, 16 MAY

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday announced financial incentives for families having more children, in an effort to counter the state's declining population trend.

Addressing a public meeting at Narasannapeta in Srikakulam district, Naidu said the government would provide Rs 30,000 for the birth of a third child and Rs 40,000 for a fourth child, adding that detailed guidelines would be issued within a month.

"I have made a new decision. We will provide Rs 30,000 immediately after the birth of a third child and Rs 40,000 for a fourth child," he said during the SwarnaAndhra SwachAndhra cleanliness programme.

The Chief Minister said that although he had earlier supported population control measures, changing demographic trends now required a shift in approach to increase the birth rate. He had previously proposed Rs 25,000 for a second child.



CM N Chandrababu Naidu *—PTI*

Health Minister Satya Kumar Yadav said the government had now extended incentives to third and subsequent children. Naidu noted that rising incomes and changing social preferences, including single-child families, were contributing to declining fertility rates.

He stressed the need to maintain the replacement-level total fertility rate (TFR) of 2.1, warning that falling populations and ageing societies had impacted economies in several countries.

Naidu also said welfare support under the Talliki Vandanam scheme would be reviewed, while promising infrastructure and irrigation development in Srikakulam district with fixed project timelines up to 2027.

Separately, he urged citizens to adopt economic caution amid global tensions, advising reduced gold purchases, increased use of public transport, and work-from-home practices in line with broader policy guidance. *—PTI*

Bengal govt dissolves Police Welfare Board

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

The West Bengal government on Saturday dissolved the Police Welfare Board, Chief Minister **Suvendu Adhikari** said.

The Chief Minister, after chairing an administrative review meeting at Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas district, asserted that attacks on police personnel would not be tolerated under any circumstances and stressed the need for strict enforcement of law and order. "Earlier, there was the law of the rulers; now there is the rule of the law," Adhikari said, underlining his government's stand on policing and administration.

"The Police Welfare Board was constituted with a good intention. But eventually, it became a party's frontal organisation. I do not know how that helped in the welfare of the police, but it became a place for getting illegal extension (of employment). There are people who have personally benefited. Today, we are dissolving the Board," Adhikari said.

The chief minister also announced that women police personnel would be given priority in postings within their home districts to help them balance professional and personal responsibilities.

He also asked the police to remain vigilant against infiltration through riverine tracts of the international border with Bangladesh and directed officials to strengthen surveillance in the vulnerable areas. *—PTI*

Abhishek faces FIR for pre-poll remarks

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

West Bengal Police on Saturday said they have registered an FIR against TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee for allegedly making inflammatory statements during the recent assembly polls.

The FIR was based on a complaint filed by social activist Rajib Sarkar at Baguiati Police Station in North 24 Parganas on 5 May, a day after poll results were declared, alleging that the TMC national general secretary made provocative comments on post-poll violence and the vote counting process.

It claimed Banerjee's comments were linked to Home Minister Amit Shah. *—PTI*

BJP WORKERS ACCUSED OF TORCHING ATHLETE'S HOUSE

KOLKATA, 16 MAY

Senior TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday accused BJP workers of torching the house of Asian Games gold medal-winning athlete Swapna Barman, who is also a party leader, as part of post-poll retribution violence in West Bengal.

In a post from the TMC's general secretary -- stating "India FAILED YOU, dear Swapna" -- came a day after an exasperated Barman took to social media to state that "joining politics was a mistake", in the aftermath of the alleged arson at Kaliaganj in Uttar Dinajpur.

Meanwhile, the TMC on Saturday said its fact-finding teams have visited three districts of West Bengal, where party workers were allegedly attacked by BJP-backed goons in post-poll violence. The party formed three such teams to visit South 24 Parganas, Purba Medinipur and Hooghly districts to gather ground reports from party workers and supporters who allegedly faced atrocities after its electoral setback in the recently concluded assembly elections.

Rajya Sabha MP Dola Sen said one of the teams, comprising herself, was heading to Moyna, Tamluk and Haldia in Purba Medinipur district to meet "victimised" party workers and their families. "Our workers, common people and supporters are being subjected to atrocities in several places after the poll verdict," Sen said. *—PTI*

—INSTAGRAM

Vedan to face prosecution over leopard tooth case

KOCHI, 16 MAY

A laboratory test has confirmed that the tooth worn in a pendant by rapper Vedan, real name Hirandas Murali, is genuine leopard, forest officials said. Vedan was arrested in April 2025 under the Wildlife Protection Act for allegedly possessing a leopard tooth. The Kodanad Forest Range registered the case after a police raid on an apartment where Vedan and eight others were found with cannabis. The Judicial First Class Magistrate Court in Perumbavoor sent the tooth to a central laboratory in Kolkata, which confirmed its authenticity. The court currently holds the full report, and an application will be filed to obtain a copy. Vedan claimed he was unaware the pendant contained a leopard tooth, saying it was gifted to him. With the findings, prosecution is likely to be filed soon. —*PTI*

One dead after eating wild vegetables in J&K

RAJOURI, 16 MAY

One person has died and seven others, mostly children, are hospitalised after allegedly eating a wild vegetable in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district. The incident occurred in Mohra village, Kotranka subdivision, where two families consumed the vegetable on Friday evening. They showed symptoms of food poisoning and were initially taken to the Community Health Centre in Kandi before being referred to the Government Medical College Hospital in Rajouri. Mohammad Hussain, 60, died during treatment, and the other seven are receiving care. Officials said it is "prima facie, a case of food poisoning," but investigations are ongoing to determine the exact cause of poisoning. —*PTI*

62 fall sick after eating prasad in Uttar Pradesh

KANNAUJ, 16 MAY

As many as 62 people fell ill after consuming 'prasad' during a religious ceremony at a private residence in Kannauj, Uttar Pradesh. The 'prasad', consisting of 'panchamrit' and 'panjiri', was distributed during a 'Satyanarayan Katha' on Friday night at Munna Lal Kashyap's residence in Simuapur village. Several began experiencing health issues overnight; they were initially treated by private doctors before being shifted to the district hospital. Dr Akanksha confirmed 62 patients arrived by 10.30pm, with 14 in critical condition, later referred to Tirwa Medical College. Most patients are stable and receiving treatment. District officials, including the District Magistrate, who visited the hospital and issued directives for their proper care. —*PTI*

One dead after DJ vehicle loses control in UP

BHADOHI, 16 MAY

A DJ vehicle accompanying a wedding procession in Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh, went out of control, killing a woman and injuring two girls, police said. The incident occurred in Baira Khas village on Friday evening, during the procession heading to Varanasi. The DJ, operated by a young boy, was not driven by an experienced driver. The vehicle suddenly lost control, running over Urmila Devi, 40, who died instantly, and injuring Kumari Seema and Sony. The vehicle then crashed into a tree; the driver fled the scene. The police seized the vehicle and initiated legal proceedings. The injured persons have been hospitalised, and the body of the deceased has been sent for post-mortem. —*PTI*

Media misquoted me: CJI on calling youth 'cockroaches'

Says remarks not against jobless youth but fake degree holders

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Saturday said he had been "misquoted" by a section of the media over his "unemployed youngsters are like cockroaches remark", which triggered strong criticism from political leaders, lawyers, journalists and activists.

The controversy stems from remarks made on Friday, during which the CJI, while questioning the authenticity of law degrees in a senior designation case, reportedly compared unemployed youth to "cockroaches" and said some turn into media, social media or RTI activists and begin "attacking the system".

In a clarification, he said his observations were specifically aimed at individuals who enter professions such as the Bar using fake or bogus degrees, and not at unemployed youth or dissenting voices.

Earlier, The All-India Lawyers Union called the comments "highly objectionable", saying they were undemocratic and an insult to young activists. It added that unemployment stems from policy failures, not youth, and cautioned against sweeping generalisations from constitutional authorities."

RTI activist Anjali Bhardwaj said questioning authority was central to democracy and that citizens seeking accountability were strengthening, not attacking, institutions.

RJD MP Manoj Kumar Jha criticised the remarks, saying they reflected an undemocratic attitude and undermined constitutional values. He said unemployed youth, RTI activists, independent journalists and dissenting citizens "keep democracy breathing".

Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan described the remarks as "unfortunate" and said they conveyed a wrong message about activists and dissenters.

YouTubers too hit out at the remarks in videos showing placards reading "Main cockroach hu" (I am a cockroach) alongside visuals of untreated sewage flowing through drains meant for rainwater, using the imagery to argue that youth have been pushed into activism due to systemic collapse. —*Agencies*

The Chief Justice of India Surya Kant —*PTI*

Youngsters/RTI activists who raise their voice, ask hard questions, expose systemic flaws are 'cockroaches'?? Really your Lordship?? Is this what we have come to in our 'democracy'?

-Rajdeep Sardesai, Journalist

- The controversy stems from remarks made on Friday during a hearing, in which the CJI, while questioning the authenticity of law degrees in a senior designation case, reportedly compared unemployed youth to "cockroaches".

WAS PART OF NTA PANEL

Biology lecturer behind NEET paper leak arrested

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The CBI on Saturday arrested a biology lecturer who was part of the National Testing Agency's (NTA) paper-setting committee for NEET-UG held on May 3, officials said.

The arrest was made on the basis of questioning of alleged kingpin P V Kulkarni and other accused in the paper leak case, they said.

The biology lecturer Manisha Mandhare was arrested here after being questioned by the agency at its headquarters, they said.

She was allegedly involved in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate) examination process and was appointed by the NTA as an expert, they said.

Officials said Mandhare had complete access to the Botony and Zoology question papers.

Mandhare is alleged to have mobilised prospective NEET examination candidates in April 2026 through Manisha Wagmare of Pune, who was arrested on May 14, and conducted special coaching classes for these students at her Pune residence.

It is alleged that Mandhare dictated leaked questions and responses to select students and took lakhs of rupees as fee.

Most of these questions tallied with the questions that appeared in the examination on 3 May. The NEET exam was cancelled following allegations of a paper leak.

The CBI had arrested Professor P V Kulkarni, a domain expert in chemistry from Latur on Friday. Kulkarni for years served on panels involved in setting the NEET question paper. He allegedly dictated questions to students at his home. —*PTI*

Manisha Mandhare and PV Kulkarni —*ANI*

'JIHADI DRUG'

India seizes 1st consignment of Captagon drug worth Rs 182 cr

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The Narcotics Control Bureau has busted an international drug syndicate involved in the trafficking of Captagon and seized approximately 227.7 kg of the "jihadi drug" worth Rs 182 crore, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said on Saturday.

The success was announced by Home Minister Amit Shah on X. He lauded the agency for seizing the first-ever consignment of Captagon.

Captagon is the street name historically linked to fenethylline, a synthetic stimulant developed in the 1960s which earned the sobriquet of the "jihadi drug" due to repeated allegations and intelligence inputs linking its abuse and trafficking with extremist and conflict-zone networks operating in parts of West Asia, sources said.

The terminology emerged because the stimulant effects of the drug allegedly enabled users to remain awake for extended periods, suppress fear and exhaustion, increase aggression and risk-taking behaviour, and sustain prolonged combat-like activity under stressful conditions.

In his post on X, Shah said the Modi government has resolved to make a "Drug-Free India".

"Glad to share that through 'Operation RAGEPILL', our agencies have achieved the first-ever seizure of Captagon, the so-called 'Jihadi Drug', worth Rs 182 crore," Shah said.

"The busting of the drug consignment destined for the Middle East and the arrest of a foreign national stand out as shining examples of our commitment to zero tolerance against drugs," he said.

"I repeat we will clamp down on every gram of drugs entering India or leaving the country using our territory as the transit route. Kudos to the brave and vigilant warriors of the NCB. @narcoticsbureau," the minister said. —*PTI*

Captagon is the street name historically linked to fenethylline —*ANI*

NIA chargesheets 5 in Cambodia cyber slavery racket

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted five persons, including the alleged mastermind, in a case related to trafficking and cyber slavery of Indian youths in Cambodia, officials said on Saturday.

The alleged kingpin of the human trafficking syndicate -- Anand Kumar Singh alias Munna Singh, who is absconding -- along with four co-accused, have been named in the chargesheet filed before the NIA special court in Bihar's Patna on Friday, they said.

The NIA investigation has found Anand to be the kingpin, involved in recruitment of youth through various sub-agents/travel agents in India.

He was working with associates in Cambodia to illegally traffic the victims to that country, NIA stated.

Anand charged USD 2,000-3,000 for each youth 'sold' to a fake company, it said.

The accused were involved in luring Indian youths to Cambodia on the pretext of legitimate jobs and handsome salaries, as part of an organised human trafficking syndicate. —*PTI*

Choose geography or history: Army Chief to Pak

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

In a stern military message to Islamabad, Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday said if Pakistan continues to harbour terrorists and operate against India, then they have to "decide whether they want to be part of geography or history or not".

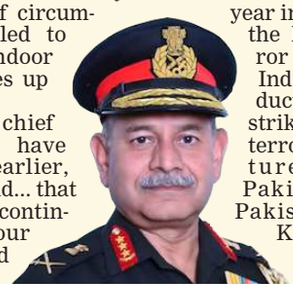
At an interactive session hosted by 'Uniform Unveiled' at the Manekshaw Centre here, he was asked about how the Indian Army will respond if circumstances that led to Operation Sindoor last year comes up again.

The Army chief said, "If you have heard me earlier, what I have said... that Pakistan, if it continues to harbour terrorists and operate against India, then they have to decide whether they want to be part of geography or history or not."

His remarks at the event, 'Sena Samwad', came days after the country and the Indian military marked the first anniversary of Operation Sindoor.

Gen Dwivedi's remarks about Pakistan reiterated India's stand against terrorism.

Operation Sindoor was launched on 7 May last year in retaliation to the Pahalgam terror attack, with Indian forces conducting precision strikes on multiple terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). —*PTI*



Posco case: Minister's son faces look-out notice

HYDERABAD, 16 MAY

The Cyberabad police have issued a look-out circular against Union Minister Bandi Sanjay Kumar's son Bandi Bageerath, who has been booked under the POCSO Act, to prevent him from fleeing the country.

A police official said on Saturday that searches are being conducted to nab Bageerath.

Meanwhile, Telangana Rakshana Sena (TRS) president K Kavitha, in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, demanded the removal of Sanjay Kumar, MoS (Home), from the Union Cabinet "to ensure a free and fair investigation in the POCSO case involving his son".

In a setback to Bageerath, the Telangana High Court on Friday night did not grant him any interim protection from arrest.

Dealing with an interim anticipatory bail petition of Bageerath, the court said it was not inclined to grant any interim order at this stage.

The counsel for Bageerath had requested interim protection from arrest until the orders on the petition were issued.

The case was registered under relevant Sections of the BNS and POCSO Act on 8 May 8 against Bageerath. —*PTI*

Talks on to secure release of hostages in Manipur

IMPHAL, 16 MAY

Talks are underway among civil society organisations, representatives of the Manipur government and security forces to ensure the safe release of those who are still being held hostage by armed groups, officials said on Saturday.

Thirty-one of around 38 people belonging to the Kuki and Naga communities, who were held hostage by armed groups in Kangpokpi and Senapati districts, were released on Thursday and Friday.

These people were taken to undisclosed locations after suspected militants shot dead three church leaders and injured four others in Kangpokpi on Wednesday, while a civilian was gunned down and his wife was wounded in Noney district.

All-out efforts are being made to ensure the "safe release of the remaining persons", the police said.

As a result of "concerted efforts" the "majority of the detained civilians, belonging to different communities, have been released safely", the police said in a statement.

"Talks are going on among civil society organisations, representatives of the state government, security forces and Naga and Kuki stakeholders to ensure the safe release of those who are still being held hostage by armed groups," an official said. —*PTI*

Community members console women released after being allegedly held captive in Kangpokpi district of Manipur—*PTI*

IMD to change parameters to declare heatwaves

T'PURAM, 16 MAY

The IMD, along with its technical partners, will soon revise the criteria for declaring heatwave conditions in the country, as the present parameters do not suit India's geographical conditions, according to official sources here.

Kerala, in particular, has faced difficulties in issuing heatwave warnings because of the limitations of the existing parameters.

Sources in the India Meteorological Depart ment said the state experienced severe heat and humidity this summer and, for the first time, weather forecasts were made based on the anti-cyclone system that formed near the Karnataka–Maharashtra coast.

"We have never had an anti-cyclone system form closer to the South before, and this time we had to predict the weather based on it," a senior IMD official said.

According to experts, Kerala has become a climate change hotspot, with a steady increase in atmospheric temperatures and erratic monsoons.

The IMD has also predicted a below-normal monsoon this year, as this is the first time two consecutive El Nino years are being witnessed. —*PTI*

SHE WAS BEATEN UP TOO

Pregnant wife dies as husband force-feeds abortion pills in R'than

JAIPUR, 16 MAY

A 41-year-old pregnant woman was allegedly beaten and forcibly administered abortion pills by her husband in Rajasthan's Bhilwara district, leading to her death, police said on Saturday.

An official -- part of the medical team that conducted the post-mortem -- described the condition of the body as "shocking", with more than a dozen injury marks on the head, face, waist and private parts indicating "sustained violence". There were also signs of forced abortion, he said.

The incident took place in the BSL Colony area under Hamirgarh police station limits on Wednesday night, where the accused, Gopi Singh Yadav, allegedly assaulted his five-month pregnant wife Roli Devi.

According to police, the woman sustained severe injuries during the assault, leading to a miscarriage and excessive bleeding, which ultimately caused her death.

The couple's 14-year-old daughter, in her statement to police, alleged that her father began beating her mother in the morning and continued intermittently throughout the day.

She further alleged that the accused man went to the market during the day, brought abortion pills and forcibly administered them to the victim, worsening her condition.

DSPolice (Sadar) Harjeeram said a case has been registered based on the daughter's statement and the accused husband, a native of Uttar Pradesh, has been arrested.

Preliminary probe suggests a domestic dispute between the couple may have led to the incident, he said. —*PTI*

Ecologically fragile sites are 'no dvpt zones' in Goa

PANAJI, 16 MAY

The Goa government has notified 4 lakh square metres of ecologically sensitive land around the protected heritage precinct of Old Goa and a patch of mangroves in St Cruz village panchayat as 'no development zones', banning any construction or development activity in these land parcels.

State Town and Country Planning Minister Vishwajit Rane on Saturday said that the conservation of these areas, comprising orchards, salt pans, and mangroves, has been carried out under section 39(A) of the Town and Country Planning Act (TCP Act).

The TCP Board, in a notification on Thursday, declared 1.02 lakh square metres of land around Old Goa, comprising partly of orchards and an archaeological park, as a 'no development zone'.

Old Goa is the former colonial capital of the coastal state and a UNESCO World Heritage site comprising churches and colonial Portuguese-era structures.

The TCP Board has also notified 3.37 lakh square metres, comprising salt pans, mangroves and other ecologically sensitive sites, as 'no development zones in St Cruz village.

Rane said the village is home to rich salt pans and paddy fields that need to be protected from being converted into settlement zones. —*PTI*

SUN SCORCHED

A man rides a bicycle fitted with a makeshift canopy on a hot summer day in Hyderabad, while a woman shields herself and a child from the intense heat in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh -*PTI*

WFI LANDS A BLOW ON VINESH'S COMEBACK

The fresh standoff between Vinesh Phogat and the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has now moved beyond a routine eligibility dispute, something that could shape both her future and the power dynamics in Indian wrestling ahead of the 2026 Asian Games.

The WFI is treating the matter not merely as a technical eligibility issue linked to retirement and return-to-competition rules, but as a disciplinary case. That distinction is crucial because it determines what options Vinesh now has.

WFI President Sanjay Singh has made it clear that the federation has, for now, shut the door on her comeback. Yet, even within the federation's hardline position lies a narrow pathway for the wrestler if she chooses to pursue it.

Wrestler Vinesh Phogat arrived at the venue of the National Open Ranking Wrestling Tournament amid a row over her eligibility and the Wrestling Federation of India's show-cause notice, in Gonda, Uttar Pradesh on 11 May -*PTI*

At the centre of the dispute is WFI's allegation that Vinesh violated federation regulations during the trials process back in 2023 when the federation was suspended and was being managed by IOA-appointed ad-hoc panel.

Vinesh has already been asked for an explanation and it won't be a surprise if the then ad-hoc panel members are also asked to explain the decision making. The panel was led by Bhupinder Singh Bajwa

"Yes, if Vinesh needs to do some explaining, the ad hoc panel members too are equally responsible for not caring a bit for WFI and UWW rules. They can also be sought now for answers, if need be," a WFI official told PTI.

Sanjay Singh indicated while talking to PTI that WFI believes Vinesh's troubles are self-inflicted rather than administrative.

"You yourself are an athlete. Can you give a trial on the same day in two weights?', he asked, referring to one of the allegations against her. She did not give any satisfactory answer when she met me."

While the federation has suspended her domestically, the bigger question is: what next for Vinesh?

The first and perhaps simplest route is procedural compliance.

WFI has repeatedly stated that the door is not permanently closed. Singh himself said the federation is waiting for her written clarification.

"If that clarification is satisfactory, then her return will be accepted. If it is not satisfactory, then she will not be able to play," he said.

That means Vinesh's immediate future depends on whether she engages with the disciplinary mechanism or escalates the matter legally and politically.

One possibility is that she submits a detailed response to the show-cause notice and seeks her return to competitive wrestling before the disciplinary committee.

If the committee clears her, she could return to domestic competition in time to remain in contention for major international events, including the Asian Games qualification.

Vinesh is such a formidable athlete that she still is a strong medal contender if she goes to Japan.

However, if WFI rejects her explanation, the conflict could move into a legal arena.

Vinesh may challenge the federation's action either before the Delhi High Court, the sports ministry, or even seek intervention through the Indian Olympic Association, especially if she argues that WFI's action is arbitrary or selectively enforced.

She has already alleged there was a "conspiracy" to ensure she "remains retired forever".

That claim gains significance because the dispute cannot be separated from the larger fallout of the wrestlers' protest movement that divided Indian wrestling over the last few years.

Vinesh, one of the faces of the protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, has remained at odds with the current federation leadership despite the administrative transition.

The National Open Ranking Tournament was expected to mark her competitive return and possibly lay the foundation for selection into future international events.

Missing that event means she now risks falling behind in the domestic selection ladder at a time when younger wrestlers are already establishing themselves in her categories. Wrestlers like Antim Panghal and Meenakshi Goyat are perfect example of that.

Yet there remains one important factor working in Vinesh's favour: there appears to be no international suspension against her from United World Wrestling or anti-doping authorities.

But UWW President Nenad Lalovic has made it clear that it won't interfere in WFI matters.

"Lalovic has told WFI that she is not UWW athlete but WFI athlete, so he won't interfere and rather back the national federation to do its job as per the rules."

Without WFI clearance, she cannot realistically progress through India's official selection pathway for global events.

The federation, meanwhile, appears prepared for a prolonged standoff.

When asked whether Vinesh could return after June 2026 if there was no international restriction on her, Singh again insisted that the matter depends entirely on the disciplinary process.

"I am telling you, she should give us her clarification. If that clarification is satisfactory, then his return will be accepted," he said.

For now, the message from WFI is unmistakable: the onus is on Vinesh to convince the federation. —*PTI*

SALAR سالار

Why are Israel, UAE keeping their ties quiet?

The tight relationship between Israel and the United Arab Emirates is typically managed discreetly. But this week, it was thrust into the open, illuminating tensions underlying the alliance as the Iran war embroils the entire region.

The US Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, first brought attention to the strengthening ties between Israel and the UAE by revealing that Israel had sent Iron Dome air-defence weapons and personnel to operate them to help protect the UAE from Iranian attacks.

Then, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had quietly visited the UAE during the war, prompting a hasty public denial from the Gulf nation.

As Netanyahu and the Trump administration ballyhoo their alliances as part of an effort to bolster the region's anti-Iran factions, the Gulf states prefer to downplay these partnerships — a sign of how public ties to Israel remain deeply controversial in the region.

Here's what you need to know about the Israel-UAE relationship:

Isreali PM Benjamin Netanyahu and UAE PM Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum -*PTI*

- Israel and the UAE collaborated militarily during the war with Iran. Israel benefited from having a defence foothold in a country geographically closer to its archenemy. The UAE, meanwhile, gained access to Israeli military technology, like the Iron Dome air-defence system. The alliance has also been a boon for both countries' economies, with trade between them rising steadily since 2020.

WHY WOULD THE UAE DENY NETANYAHU'S VISIT?

Netanyahu's decision to reveal his wartime trip to Abu Dhabi rocked the boat.

Reports swirled that Israel's security chiefs had also visited.

The UAE's official WAM news agency posted an article denying "reports circulating" about the visit. The agency wrote that the country's relations with Israel "are public and conducted within the framework of the well-known and officially declared Abraham Accords."

The report also denied any Israeli military delegation was received in the UAE.

"It complicates Abu Dhabi's wartime-frame posture by forcing it into the open — which is why the denial was issued so quickly and worded so carefully," said Hesham Alghannam, a Saudi-based scholar at the Malcolm H Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center.

Though the UAE normalised relations with Israel in 2020, its rulers like to keep the alliance somewhat quiet.

Antipathy toward the Jewish state runs high in Arab and Muslim countries across West Asia. The negative feelings were magnified by Isreal's genocide war in Gaza.

Israel since 2023 has flattened much of Gaza and killed over 72,700 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry.

That conflict spilled across the region, with Israel waging deadly and damaging campaigns against Iran-backed militants in Lebanon and Yemen, and striking militant targets in Qatar and Syria.

"We are the ugly duckling of West Asia," said Dan Diker, the president of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, a conservative Israeli think tank.

Diker, who has had extensive talks and relationships with Abraham Accord countries in the region, said the regional officials with whom he often negotiated always asked to keep things under the radar.

WHAT IS THE ISRAEL-UAE ALLIANCE BASED ON?

Israel and the UAE collaborated militarily during the war with Iran. Israel benefited from having a defence foothold in a country geographically closer to its archenemy. The UAE, meanwhile, gained access to Israeli military technology, like the Iron Dome air-defence system.

The alliance has also been a boon for both countries' economies, with trade between them rising steadily since 2020. Israel, long isolated in West Asia, gains legitimacy by partnering with an Arab country. And the UAE gains power in Washington.

The UAE was the third Arab country, after Egypt and Jordan, to establish full diplomatic ties with Israel.

WHY DID NETANYAHU PUBLICISE HIS VISIT?

Netanyahu faces fierce domestic opposition headed into an election season in Israel. He believes his image is bolstered if he can show his base that he is a West Asia power broker.

The Iran war did not much help the leader's domestic popularity. One thing that could help it — while strengthening his strained relationship with President Donald Trump — would be more regional powers following the UAE's lead.

Israel is currently in talks with Azerbaijan to join the Abraham Accords.

But if Netanyahu was hopeful that broadcasting close Israel-UAE ties could serve as a model for other countries, he may need to temper expectations.

Saudi Arabia, a leader in the region that has resisted joining the Abraham Accords, has taken a different approach throughout the war.

It has maintained open lines of communication with Tehran, and has supported Pakistan's mediation between the sides, said Alghannam, the Saudi Arabia-based scholar.

"The aim is not to take a posture on Israel, per se. It is to refuse entanglement in a war whose dynamics Riyadh did not set and cannot control," he said.

"Riyadh discussing the full range of options openly, with partners, without locking into one track, is itself a strategic signal," he said. "The regional security architecture will be designed regionally, not inherited from whatever Washington and Tehran negotiate bilaterally." —*PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Drones are making Sudan's war even deadlier for civilians

Drone warfare has become the deadliest threat to civilians in Sudan's conflict, and both the military and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces are being supplied by a number of countries in the Middle East and beyond, experts say.

"Armed drones have now become by far and away the leading cause of civilian deaths," or over 80 per cent of conflict-related deaths, United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk said this week, calling for measures to prevent their transfer to Sudan. Drones killed at least 880 civilians between January and April.

The war in Sudan began in April 2023 and has killed at least 59,000 people, displaced some 13 million and pushed parts of the country into famine.

In recent weeks, the RSF has carried out drone attacks on Khartoum International Airport and other areas near the capital, which the army seized control of last year.

Analysts say foreign-supplied advanced drone technology enables the warring parties to expand strikes on densely populated areas, complicating peace efforts and raising fears of a broader proxy conflict.

Drones have targeted hospitals, dams, schools and markets

"On the battlefield, drones have emerged as a force multiplier, enabling ground offensives and weakening enemy defences," said Jalale Getachew Birru, East Africa senior analyst at the US-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data project.

Both the army and RSF use drones to secure contested territory, disrupt mobilisation efforts and spread insecurity in areas controlled by rivals, he said.

At least 2,670 people, including combatants and civilians, were killed in 2025, marking a 600 per cent increase in drone-related deaths and an 81 per cent increase in drone attacks compared to the previous year, ACLED found.

Drone strikes by the warring parties have targeted civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, dams, schools, markets and displacement camps.

Most of the civilian deaths in drone attacks have occurred in the Kordofan region in the central Sudan, according to Turk.

On 8 May, drone strikes in South Kordofan and near the city of el-Obeid in North Kordofan reportedly killed 26 civilians. More than 70 people were killed in drone attacks on densely populated areas in Kordofan earlier this year, according to the Sudan Doctors Network.

The war in Sudan began in April 2023 and has killed at least 59,000 people, displaced some 13 million and pushed the country into famine —*UN*

On Tuesday, a Sudanese rights group, the Emergency Lawyers, said nine drone attacks on civilian vehicles had killed at least 36 people over the past 10 days across seven provinces.

The group blamed both the army and RSF and said some drones use visual monitoring technology capable of distinguishing targets, raising concerns that the attacks may not have been indiscriminate.

Drones played a role in the deadly seizure of El-Fasher

The paramilitary RFS began only last year to use drones widely, said Gabriella Tejeda, research associate at The Soufan Centre.

The army and RSF are competing to obtain new drone models, particularly from China, but the RSF is modifying drones and "increasingly competing to acquire newer, more sophisticated models, with the UAE likely supplying them," Tejeda said. The United Arab Emirates has denied supplying drones to the RSF.

Nathaniel Raymond, executive director of the Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health, said the RSF is backed by external technology, particularly from the UAE, with satellite imagery showing its use of Chinese-made CH-95 and FH-95 drones that are roughly the size of small aircraft.

In areas such as El-Fasher city in North Darfur, where at least 6,000 people were killed over three days last year, RSF drones shut down communications of civilians "crying for help" and target them where a signal is detected, Raymond said.

The RSF couldn't have seized the city without these capabilities, he added.

"The sophistication of how they use drones in el-Fasher is unique because it's the first time you've seen this layered, hunter-killer concept of operations to kill people, basically in a kill box or trapped inside a wall, in this case to prevent them from crying for help," Raymond said of the city, where UN experts said the violence indicated "hallmarks of genocide."

THE ARMY'S DRONES HAVE HIT CIVILIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The army's drone technology has been blamed for striking civilian infrastructure such as Al Daein Teaching Hospital in East Darfur, where at least 64 people were killed. The army officially denied responsibility. Two military officials at the time, however, said the intended target was a nearby police station.

Raymond said there has been an "alarming increase" in army drone strikes on protected infrastructure such as schools and markets in the past four to six months. The army has maintained that it doesn't target civilian infrastructure.

Last month, ACLED said the army's drone technology is supplied by Turkey, Russia, Iran and Egypt, while the RSF is supplied via networks linked to the UAE through regional transit points including Ethiopia, Chad and Libya.

Earlier this month, the Sudanese government accused neighbouring Ethiopia of being behind recent drone attacks on sites including the Khartoum airport. It accused the UAE of supplying the drones. Both countries denied the allegations. —*PTI*

8 killed as cargo train hits bus at Bangkok crossing

BANGKOK, 16 MAY

A cargo train struck a public bus at a railway crossing in Bangkok, Thailand, on Saturday, killing at least eight people and injuring over 20. The crash occurred near an airport rail link station in the late afternoon. Videos shared on social media showed vehicles stopped at the crossing when the train collided with an orange bus, which was then engulfed in flames. The impact also dragged nearby vehicles along the tracks, and motorcycles and riders were thrown onto the road. Rescuers, including those from Erawan Medical Centre, later entered the charred bus after the flames were brought under control. Emergency services confirmed the casualties and injuries from the devastating accident. —*PTI*

Strike shuts North America's largest commuter rail line

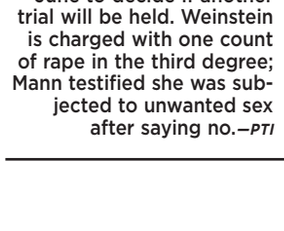
WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

North America's largest commuter rail system shut down Saturday after workers on New York's Long Island Rail Road went on strike following failed contract negotiations over wages and healthcare premiums. Five unions representing about half the workforce walked out after months of talks with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority failed despite intervention by President Donald Trump's administration. Union official Kevin Sexton said both sides remained "far apart", while MTA chairman Janno Lieber claimed the agency had met union pay demands. The strike, LIRR's first since 1994, disrupted travel for about 2,50,000 daily commuters and threatened transport to Yankees, Mets and Knicks games. —*PTI*

Congo's Ebola outbreak toll rises to 80

ITURI, 16 MAY

At least 80 deaths have now been reported in Congo's latest Ebola outbreak in the eastern Ituri province, as health workers intensify screening and contact tracing efforts. Initially announced on Friday, the outbreak has seen 65 deaths and 246 suspected cases. Locals in Bunia, the provincial capital, describe constant burials and fears, with one resident, Jean Marc Asimwe, saying, "Every day, people are dying ... and this has been going on for about a week. In a single day, we bury two, three, or even more people." Congolese Health Minister Samuel-Roger Kamba confirmed eight lab-confirmed cases, with four deaths, identifying the Bundibugyo virus. The suspected index case is a nurse who died in Bunia three weeks ago. —*PTI*



— WIKIPEDIA

Harvey's rape case declared mistrial after jury deadlock

NEW YORK, 16 MAY

Harvey Weinstein's rape retrial ended in a mistrial after the jury was deadlocked, leaving the case unresolved after three trials. The former Hollywood producer, already convicted of other sex crimes, appeared emotionless as he was led out in his wheelchair. The jury, mostly male, deliberated over whether Weinstein raped Jessica Mann, a hairstylist and actor, in 2013. Jurors indicated they "have concluded that they cannot reach" a unanimous verdict, prompting Judge Curtis Farber to instruct them to continue deliberating. A hearing is scheduled for 24 June to decide if another trial will be held. Weinstein is charged with one count of rape in the third degree; Mann testified she was subjected to unwanted sex after saying no. —*PTI*

Trump dubs meeting with Xi as 'G2'

'No point flying 9,500 miles to defend Taiwan'

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

US President Donald Trump returned from his three-day visit to China where held talks with President Xi Jinping, and described the meeting between "two great countries" as the "G2".

Trump landed at the Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on the outskirts of Washington on Friday, claiming to have struck important trade deals, including one for China's purchase of 200 aircraft from Boeing, with a promise for another 750, as well as agreements benefiting the American agriculture sector.

"This is the G-2. I think it'll go down as a very important moment in history," Trump told Fox News. The G7 group refers to the world's seven largest economies.

Trump also appeared to distance the US from Taiwan.

"I'm not looking to have somebody go independent and we're supposed to travel 9,500 miles to fight a war. I want them to cool down. I want China to cool down", he said.

He also said that the relationship with Xi was important and suggested that China may not resort to any aggressive moves over Taiwan, while he is in office. "It's not a takeover. They just don't want to see this place — we'll call it a place because nobody knows how to define it — but they don't want to see it go independent."

Trump also described the US' massive USD 14 billion arms package to the self-governing island that China claims as its own as "very good negotiating chip".

The US is bound by its own laws to provide Taiwan with the means to defend itself.

IRAN TO UNVEIL HORMUZ PLAN

Although both China and the US stressed the need for an "open" Strait of Hormuz, Iran said that it will "unveil" its plan to charge tolls through the key waterway soon. Senior Iranian lawmaker Ebrahim Azizi said on X that the system will include designated routes and will guarantee trade security.

"Only commercial vessels and parties cooperating with Iran will benefit from it," he stated. "The necessary rights in exchange for the specialised services provided will be obtained for Iran."

This likely refers to a toll mechanism. —*Agencies*

Putin to visit China for 2 days next week

Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping on a two-day trip to Beijing next week, the Kremlin said on Saturday. The Kremlin said Putin's trip has been planned for 19-20 May, scheduled to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship. It said that the two leaders would discuss bilateral relations as well as "key international and regional issues" and economic cooperation.

Trump briefs Takaichi on China visit

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi on Friday held a telephonic conversation with Trump following his visit to China, during which the two leaders discussed issues related to China, economic security, and regional stability. Trump reaffirmed their "ironclad" ties, while Takaichi stated that they also discussed Iran. After Takaichi said that Japan could get drawn into a military conflict to defend Taiwan from China, ties between Beijing and Tokyo turned for the worse.

Islamic State's 2nd in command killed in US-Nigerian strike

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

US and Nigerian forces killed the second-in-command of the Islamic State group globally on Friday, US President Donald Trump announced on Truth Social. Trump offered few details about the killing of Abu Bakr al-Mainuki in African's most populous country.

He "thought he could hide in Africa, but little did he know we had sources who kept us informed on what he was doing," Trump stated.

Nigerian President Bola Tinubu confirmed the operation and said Al-Mainuki was killed alongside "several of his lieutenants, during a strike on his compound in the Lake Chad Basin".

Al-Mainuki was viewed as the key figure in IS organising and finance, and had been plotting attacks against the US sand its interests, an official said.

Born in Nigeria's Borno province in 1982, al-Mainuki took the helm of the IS branch in West Africa after the group's previous leader in the region, Mamman Nur, was killed in 2018, according to the Counter Extremism Project, which tracks militant groups.

Al-Mainuki was based in the Sahel area, the group said, adding that he allegedly fought in Libya when IS was active there more than a decade ago. He was sanctioned by the US in 2023.

The US has deployed troops drones to Nigeria earlier this year as Trump claimed that Christians were being persecuted in the country that has been battling multiple armed groups, some of which are affiliated with the IS. The IS shifted its focus to Africa after the collapse of its caliphate in Syria and Iraq in 2017. —*PTI*

Students missing after militant attack

An unspecified number of students are missing after suspected jihadi militants attacked a secondary school in Nigeria's north-eastern Borno state on Friday, police said. Several students cannot be accounted for after the attack, Nahum Daso, Borno police spokesperson said, adding that it is unclear if students were abducted and they can only confirm details of many students who "fled for safety during the pandemonium". Abduction of school children has become common in Nigeria, where the government is battling several armed groups across the country, including the Boko Haram, which targets educational institutions for ransom and attention.

DEIR AL BALAH, 16 MAY

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Israel Katz said an airstrike on Gaza targeted Hamas' military wing leader **Izz al-Din al-Haddad**, even as the strikes killed at least seven people.

Hamas officials later confirmed that al-Haddad was killed in one of the two strikes, which wounded dozens of others, and targeted a residential building and vehicle.

In a statement, Netanyahu and Katz said that al-Haddad was "one of the architects" of the 7 October attack.

Gaza has seen near-daily Israeli fire despite a ceasefire agreement reached in October. More than 850 people have been killed since then, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The Ministry is part of the Hamas-run government, but staffed by medical professionals who maintain detailed records, viewed as reliable by the international community. Netanyahu and Katz threatened to continue to work against the 7 October attackers. —*PTI*

> **There were those who said: get out, get out! We did not get out.... Today we control 60 per cent (of Gaza). Tomorrow we shall see**
>
> —Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli PM

Israel extends Lebanon ceasefire by 45 days, then kills 6

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

Israel and Lebanon agreed to a 45-day extension of their ceasefire after another round of talks in Washington, the US State Department said on Friday. However, on Saturday, Israel continued to bomb Lebanon, killing at least six people, and issuing evacuation orders for several towns and villages in southern Lebanon, indicating imminent airstrikes, and forcing mass evacuation, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA) reported.

The ceasefire extension came after two "productive" days of talks, and will be followed by more negotiations 2-3 June, State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said. The previously agreed upon ceasefire was set to end on Saturday.

"We hope these discussions will advance lasting peace between the two countries, full recognition of each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and establishing genuine security along their shared border," Pigott said on social media. This was the third round of talks between the two neighbours that don't have diplomatic relations with each other.

Israeli airstrike on the southern Lebanon city of Habboush on Saturday —NNA

Yet, the strikes continued. At least six people were killed, including three paramedics, and 22 were wounded in an strike on a civil defence centre in southern Lebanon, NNA reported. —*Agencies*

Pak plans PKR 100B defence hike in IMF-backed budget

ISLAMABAD, 16 MAY

Pakistan plans to increase its defence budget by about PKR 100 billion in the next fiscal year as it prepares its budget under an IMF-backed reform programme.

According to an IMF staff report after the third review of the $7 billion Extended Fund Facility and second review of the $1.4 billion Resilience and Sustainability Facility, defence expenditure for 2026-27 is estimated at PKR 2.665 trillion compared to PKR 2.564 trillion this year. The IMF projected Pakistan's total federal revenues for 2026-27 at PKR 17.144 trillion, more than PKR 2 trillion higher than the current fiscal year.

The government also committed to increasing total federal and provincial expenditure by 0.2 per cent of GDP to PKR 4.227 trillion. It plans to digitise all government payments by June 2027 and identify 10 most corruption-prone institutions for audits. —*PTI*

SL imposes 50% tax on car imports to halt currency crash

COLOMBO, 16 MAY

The Sri Lankan government has introduced a 50 per cent surcharge on vehicle imports, excluding motorbikes and three-wheelers, to address the ongoing slide of the country's currency. President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, also finance minister, announced in a notification that "by this order levy on imported goods specified in the schedule here to a surcharge at the rate of 50 per cent on applicable customs duty effect from 16 May for a period of three months".

The rupee has depreciated over 3 per cent against the dollar this month, mainly due to external pressures such as the Iran war, which has caused a surge in fuel import costs. The currency, which was 309-310 at the start of the year, now exceeds 322. Deputy finance minister Anil Jayantha Fernando described the move as "temporary", aimed at delaying import purchases for three months to potentially conserve foreign reserves.

Sri Lanka's foreign reserves fell from USD 7 billion at the end of March to USD 6.76 billion in April, mainly due to high energy costs amid geopolitical tensions and rising oil prices. —*PTI*

US eyes Guyana's bauxite after Venezuela

GEORGETOWN, 16 MAY

The US is turning its attention to Guyana's vast bauxite reserves after pushing to expand oil production in Venezuela, as the Trump administration increasingly focus on Latin America's energy and mineral wealth.

US Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg held talks this week with Guyanese President Irfaan Ali and other officials. Helberg said Washington was interested in Guyana's bauxite sector, currently dominated by Chinese company Bosai Minerals, and could help conduct surveys to identify other mineral reserves.

Guyana's geopolitical importance has grown following major offshore oil discoveries and amid the global energy crisis linked to the Iran war. Analysts said Washington was trying to counter China's growing economic influence in the region after also pursuing resource cooperation in Venezuela and Brazil.

Guyanese officials, however, said Chinese firms had often been more aggressive in securing contracts and offering financing. —*PTI*

A house up in flames as Russia launched 294 drones overnight at Ukraine —UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICES

3 killed as Russian strikes continue on Ukraine

KYIV, 16 MAY

At least three people were killed and 63 others injured in Ukraine as Russian strikes continued on Saturday, local authorities said.

Russia launched 294 drones overnight, Ukraine's Air Force said, adding that 269 of them were shot down. Direct hits by 20 drones were recorded at 15 locations, while falling debris was reported at nine sites.

The deaths were recorded in Kherson Oblast, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, Donetsk Oblast, according to the regions' respective Governors.

The strikes come even as Ukraine and Russia swapped 205 prisoners of war on Friday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said it was the first phase of a planned swap of 1,000 POWs from each side. Some of the Ukrainians had been held by Russia since 2022 and fought in some of the war's fiercest battles, he added.

A rescue worker with a fawn that ran out of a forest amid Russian strikes and increasing heat —UKRAINE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Meanwhile, Russia's Ministry of Defence said that its forces shot down 138 Ukrainian drones overnight over 14 Russian regions, including Moscow. Drones were also destroyed over the annexed Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea, as well as the Black and Azov seas. —*Agencies*

STOCK MARKET MANIPULATION?

Don bought millions worth of Palantir stock, then praised it

WASHINGTON, 16 MAY

US President Donald Trump bought up shares of artificial intelligence software maker Palantir weeks before he lauded the company on Truth Social, according to records released this week by the US Office of Government Ethics. The records show thousands of transactions during the first quarter totaling hundreds of millions of dollars.

Trump disclosed a flurry of at least $220 million in financial transactions this year in the securities of several major US companies, including Microsoft, Meta Platforms, Oracle, Broadcom, Bank of America and Goldman Sachs.

Examples of large purchases, valued at between $1 million and $5 million each, were an S&P 500 Index fund, Nvidia Corp and Apple Inc.

Large sales of between $5 million and $25 million each included Microsoft, Amazon and Meta. However, the filing does not always make explicit the type of security, such as whether it was a stock or a corporate bond.

Trump has help several meetings with the heads of such companies, and praised and belittled them on social media, which has impacted their prices on the stock markets.

The manner in which Trump bought Palantir stocks elucidates this.

In March alone, Trump made at least seven purchases of Palantir totalling as much as $530,000.

> **What is happening in Ukraine, in Gaza and the Palestinian territories, in Lebanon, and in Iran illustrates the inhuman evolution of the relationship between war and new technologies in a spiral of annihilation**
>
> —Pope Leo XIV warns against proliferation of AI

The next week, he praised the AI company, known for mass surveillance.

"Palantir Technologies has proven to have great war fighting capabilities and equipment," Trump wrote Truth Social. "Just ask our enemies!" The comments came as Palantir was suffering its worst week, and instantly raised its performance. —*Agencies*

– PTI

NHPC Q4 profit up 68% to ₹1,549 cr

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

State-owned NHPC reported a 68 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 1,549.42 crore for March quarter, driven by higher revenues. The previous year's profit was Rs 919.63 crore. Total income increased to Rs 3,120.52 crore from Rs 2,557.71 crore in the same period last year. For FY 2025-26, net profit was Rs 4,220.46 crore, up from Rs 3,411.73 crore, with total income of Rs 12,686.09 crore. The board approved a final dividend of 21 paise per share for FY26. It added 1,850 MW during the year — its highest-ever capacity addition in a fiscal — commissioning three projects: Subansiri Lower (750 MW), Parbati-II (800 MW), and Karnisar Solar (300 MW). —*PTI*

'Falling rupee can wipe out gains from fuel price hike'

Rs 52K cr relief from hike covers 15% of oil cos' loss: SBI

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

An SBI Research Ecowrap report said that the Rs 52,700 crore relief from the recent Rs 3-per-litre fuel price hike covers only 15 per cent of Oil Marketing Companies' (OMCs) estimated FY27 losses.

This gain could be entirely wiped out by a mere Rs 2 depreciation in the rupee, as the resulting rise in import costs would fully offset the benefit.

The SBI Research report said the recent fuel price hike was aimed at reducing losses faced by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) due to elevated crude oil prices and unchanged retail fuel prices.

"OMCs' under recoveries on sales of petrol and diesel are soaring because of unchanged retail prices," the report said.

It added that OMCs are "incurring losses to the tune of Rs 1000 crore per day, which amounts to around Rs 3.6 lakh crore a year."

Highlighting the pressure from currency weakness, the report said, "the Rupee has already approached a critical depreciation threshold, beyond which further currency weakness could substantially erode the intended benefits of domestic fuel price revisions."

The report estimated that, assuming an average FY27 exchange rate of Rs 94 per US dollar and crude oil at USD 106 per barrel, the landed crude oil cost works out to nearly Rs 9,964 per barrel.

While the Rs 3 fuel price hike offers OMCs a benefit of around Rs 477 per barrel, a further Rs 2 depreciation in the rupee would significantly raise import costs, eroding that gain.

The report also noted that global crude oil markets remain under pressure from disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz caused by the ongoing West Asia conflict. "Crude will continue to remain under pressure owing to the depleting inventories," the report said. SBI Research concluded that India needs a broader strategy to manage external sector risks. — *ANI*

CHANDRASEKARAN WAIVES COMMISSION

TCS CEO takes home ₹28 cr in FY26

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director **K Krithivasan** took home a total remuneration of Rs 28 crore in 2025-26, marking an increase of 6.3 per cent over the previous year, according to the company's annual report.

Meanwhile, Tata Group and TCS Chairman N Chandrasekaran abstained from receiving any commissions, drawing only Rs 4.2 lakh in sitting fees for the entire fiscal year.

=Krithivasan's compensation package for the fiscal year included a basic salary of Rs 1.67 crore, benefits, perquisites, and allowances of Rs 1.43 crore, and a performance-linked commission of Rs 25 crore.

According to TCS's annual report for FY 2025-26, the CEO's remuneration was 332.8 times the median employee salary.

The report noted that median employee remuneration rose 5.1 per cent during the fiscal year. Junior and mid-level employees in India received average annual salary increases of 4.5 to 7 per cent, with top performers receiving double-digit increments.

TCS reported a 12.22 per cent jump in its March quarter net profit at Rs 13,718 crore. Meanwhile, for the fiscal year 2025-26, its profit after tax inched up 1.35 per cent to Rs 49,210 crore, as against Rs 48,553 crore in FY25. Revenue from operations jumped 9.64 per cent to Rs 70,698 crore in Q4 FY26, while the same for the full fiscal was higher by 4.58 per cent to Rs 2.67 lakh crore.

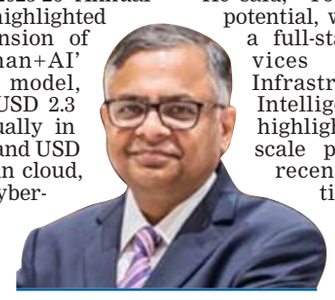
—*PTI*

TCS ramps up AI push, calls it 'infrastructure of intelligence'

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) Chairman **N Chandrasekaran** stated that artificial intelligence is transforming from a technological layer into the "infrastructure of intelligence" for enterprises worldwide. He said AI will influence enterprise investments, supply chains, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, with generative AI now moving from pilots to scaled deployment.

In his letter to shareholders in the 2025-26 Annual Report, he highlighted TCS's expansion of its 'Human+AI' operating model, generating USD 2.3 billion annually in AI services and USD 11.5 billion in cloud, data, and cybersecurity.



TCS reported a 12.22 per cent rise in March quarter net profit to Rs 13,718 crore and a 1.35 per cent increase for FY 2025-26, reaching Rs 49,210 crore. The firm added 2,356 jobs in Q4, with new deals worth USD 12 billion, led by North America and BFSI.

TCS AIMS TO BE LARGEST AI FIRM

Meanwhile, CEO K Krithivasan said TCS aims to be the world's largest AI-led tech company, with 130 of its top 139 clients choosing TCS for AI services.

He said, "To realise AI's potential, we aim to be a full-stack AI services from Infrastructure to Intelligence," and highlighted nation-scale projects and recent acquisitions, such as US-based Coastal Cloud.

—*PTI*

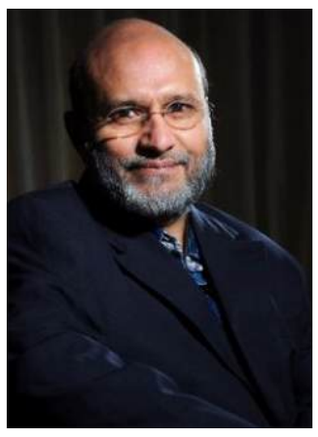
Tax wealthy, not fuel and gold: Former UN Advisor

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Former UN advisor and economist **Santosh Mehrotra** has urged the government to tax the super-rich instead of relying on indirect taxes on fuel and gold, warning that rising inflation and geopolitical tensions could severely strain India's economy.

Speaking to ANI, Mehrotra said higher duties on petrol, diesel and gold disproportionately hurt middle-and lower-income households while also triggering job losses in labour-intensive sectors. He argued that the government should impose surcharges on high-net-worth individuals and billionaires to mobilise resources more effectively.

He warned that if tensions in West Asia continue, crude oil prices could rise beyond USD 150 per barrel, worsening inflationary pressures. According to Mehrotra, disruptions in oil, gas, fertiliser and LPG supplies are already hurting MSMEs and sectors such as ceramics, restaurants, and gems and jewellery, leading to layoffs and reverse migration to rural areas.



Oil price shock to widen current account deficit, push inflation higher as US-Iran war continues

-Santosh Mehrotra, Economist

He also cautioned that the rupee, which has weakened from below Rs 90 to nearly Rs 96 against the dollar in recent months, could touch Rs 100 in the next quarter. —*ANI*

Rising oil prices, gold to widen trade deficit: ICICI

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Rising crude oil and gold prices amid escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia are expected to widen India's trade deficit and push inflation higher in the coming months, according to reports by ICICI Securities and Bank of Baroda.

ICICI Securities warned that with global crude prices likely to average around USD 100 per barrel, India's current account deficit (CAD) could rise to 1.5–2 per cent of GDP this year. The brokerage said resilient services exports may provide some cushion, but elevated oil and gold imports remain a concern.

India's goods exports rose 14 per cent year-on-year to USD 43.6 billion in April, driven by a 35 per cent jump in oil exports and a 9 per cent rise in non-oil exports. Electronics exports hit a record USD 5.2 billion, while engineering goods and chemicals also posted gains. However, exports to West Asia fell 28 per cent due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.

ICICI Securities warned that with global crude prices are likely to average around USD 100 per barrel —*AI*

Imports climbed 10 per cent to USD 71.9 billion, led by an 82 per cent surge in gold imports and a sharp rise in oil imports as crude prices touched nearly USD 105 per barrel. As a result, India's goods trade deficit widened to USD 28.4 billion in April from USD 20.7 billion in March.

Separately, Bank of Baroda said wholesale inflation accelerated to 8.3 per cent in April, its highest since October 2022. Fuel and power inflation surged to 24.7 per cent, while manufactured product inflation rose to 4.6 per cent amid soaring metal prices and a weakening rupee. Food inflation, however, remained relatively subdued at 2.3 per cent. —*ANI*

AI reshaping venture capital: WEF

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has highlighted that Artificial Intelligence is not just another venture sector but a force that is rewriting how companies are built, scaled and financed. The industry must adapt its capital structures, regulatory frameworks and talent ecosystems to support a new era of capital-efficient, infrastructure-heavy growth.

With AI-native firms reaching USD 100 million in annual recurring revenue in under a year and five companies alone absorbing 20 per cent of global VC funding in 2025, the WEF report warns that traditional SaaS valuation frameworks and liquidity mechanisms are becoming obsolete.

Artificial Intelligence is not just another venture sector but a force that is rewriting how companies are built —*AI*

Traditional VC and SaaS models targeted software for human users, capping the market by population size. AI breaks this limit by automating cognitive work itself—like legal and medical tasks—expanding the market opportunity by an order of magnitude beyond human workflows. — *ANI*

IDFC FIRST BANK CASE: CBI TO PROBE 5 IAS OFFICERS' ROLE

CHANDIGARH, 16 MAY

The Haryana government has given a green signal to the CBI to investigate the alleged role of five IAS officers in the Rs 590-crore IDFC First Bank fraud case.

The permission was granted under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), which bars police from inquiring into or investigating any offence allegedly committed by a public servant without prior approval from the relevant competent authority.

With the government's go-ahead, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) can now call the officers for questioning, sources said. The CBI conducted searches at multiple locations in Chandigarh and Panchkula on Thursday in connection with the bank scam case and seized financial records and digital evidence linked to the alleged fraud.

The CBI conducted searches at multiple locations in Chandigarh and Panchkula on Thursday in connection with the bank scam case —*AI*

- Certain officials of the IDFC First Bank and the AU Small Finance Bank, along with State employees had allegedly misappropriated government funds.

Certain officials of the IDFC First Bank and the AU Small Finance Bank, in connivance with public servants from various Haryana government departments, had allegedly misappropriated government funds through fraudulent means, an official statement said on Friday.

Sixteen individuals accused have so far been arrested. — *PTI*

CRACKDOWN ON BIKE TAXIS

Maharashtra asks Apple, Google to pull Uber, Ola, Rapido from app stores

MUMBAI, 16 MAY

The Maharashtra State Cyber Department has issued notices to Apple and Google directing them to remove ride-hailing applications Uber, Ola and Rapido from their app stores over alleged illegal bike taxi operations in Maharashtra.

The notices, issued on 15 May by the Office of the Additional Director General of Police, Maharashtra Cyber under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, instructed the companies to "remove and disable access" to the apps' bike taxi services.

The action followed a letter from Maharashtra Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik on May 12 seeking action against bike taxi aggregators operating in the state.

Authorities alleged the platforms were offering passenger transport services without valid permissions or compliance with transport regulations and the Motor Vehicles Act. The notices also raised concerns over inadequate driver verification, insurance safeguards, women's safety measures and emergency response systems.

The notices, issued on 15 May instructed the companies to 'remove and disable access' to the apps' bike taxi services —*ANI*

The Cyber Department cited a recent case in which a woman allegedly died while using a bike taxi service, adding that several similar incidents had been reported across Maharashtra.

Officials warned Apple and Google that failure to comply could attract legal action under the IT Act and intermediary liability rules.

While the notices target bike taxi operations, cab, auto and food delivery services on the apps will continue.

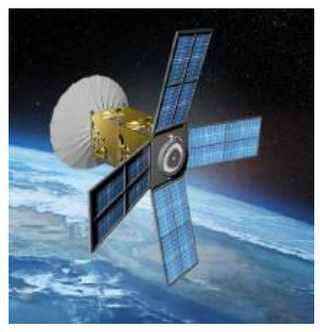
The state government said it wants bike taxi services to operate only through using electric vehicles in line with Maharashtra's EV policy. —*Agencies*

Industry leaders urge resilient telecoms with satellite & AI links

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

As India's digital economy rapidly expands, industry leaders emphasised the importance of resilient, intelligent telecom networks supported by satellite, AI, and fibre to drive future growth. Celebrating World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) 2026, stakeholders highlighted that secure, scalable networks are essential for sectors like finance, governance, healthcare, mobility, and AI ecosystems.

SP Kochhar, Director General of COAI, noted that telecom networks have evolved beyond communication, now underpinning the economy's real-time digital systems, from UPI transactions to healthcare and manufacturing. AK Bhatt of ISpA highlighted the role of satellite communications in ensuring connectivity in remote and disaster-hit areas, calling for faster regulatory reforms.



Industry executives stressed the importance of AI, cloud-native tech, edge computing, and secure platforms for resilient ecosystems. Pankaj Malik forecasted deeper fibreisation and low-latency networks as vital for future telecom growth. Rahul Tandon emphasised the role of security in building trusted digital environments. —*ANI*

CCPA orders probe on Amazon, JioMart Flipkart & Meesho

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Four major e-commerce platforms: Amazon, Flipkart, Meesho and JioMart have all delisted an allegedly unregistered agro-chemical product following notices issued by the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA).

The platforms informed the regulator that listings of "Cyclosinone Herbicide" had been removed, and that seller accounts had been placed under scrutiny, the regulator said in a statement on Saturday.

The CCPA, however, said the responses were only a first step and directed that the matter be investigated.

The notices were originally issued following a complaint by the Crop Care Federation of India (CCFI) , forwarded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, alleging that the herbicide was being actively sold and promoted online despite not featuring in the Schedule to the Insecticides Act, 1968. — *PTI*

-PTI

Pant fined ₹ 12 lakh for team's slow over-rate vs CSK

LUCKNOW, 16 MAY

Lucknow Super Giants skipper Rishabh Pant has been fined Rs 12 lakh after his team maintained a slow over-rate during their IPL match against Chennai Super Kings. LSG beat CSK by seven wickets on Friday. "As this was his team's first offence of the season under Article 2.22 of the IPL's Code of Conduct, which pertains to minimum over-rate offences, Rishabh Pant was fined INR 12 lakhs," an IPL media release stated. Cricketer-turned-commentator Ravi Shastri reckons Chennai Super Kings would have learnt some hard lessons from their seven-wicket defeat to Lucknow Super Giants, but backed the five-time champions to bounce back strongly in their final two league matches to keep their playoff hopes alive.—*PTI*

-PCB

Fatima Sana leads charge for Pak in T20 World Cup

LAHORE, 16 MAY

Fatima Sana will continue to lead Pakistan, which will have five players set to make their maiden appearance in next month's Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales. The selectors announced Pakistan's 15-member squad on Saturday, which will also take part in a triangular T20I series in Ireland before the T20 World Cup. The West Indies will be the third team in the tri-series. Eyman Fatima, Natalia Pervaiz, Rameen Shamim, Saira Jabeen, and Tasmia Rubab are the players bound for their first appearance in the T20 World Cup. Pakistan will take on India in their tournament opener on June 14 at Birmingham. The tri-series will be played in Dublin from 28 May to 4 June, following which Pakistan will take on Sri Lanka on 6 June.—*PTI*

Senthilkumar, Joshna win big in HCL National squash

CHENNAI, 16 MAY

Top seeds Velavan Senthilkumar and Joshna Chinappa produced a superb display to clinch the mixed doubles title at the 3rd HCL National Doubles Squash Championships here on Saturday.

The top-seeded pair defeated the second-seeded duo of Abhay Singh and Rathika Seelan 11-7, 11-9 in a closely fought final at the Indian Squash Academy.

Earlier in the tournament, both Senthilkumar and Joshna had also captured the men's and women's doubles crowns, respectively, with their partners.

Senthilkumar teamed up with Abhay to secure the men's doubles title for a third consecutive year after beating second seeds Rahul Baitha and Suraj Kumar Chand 11-8, 11-5 in the final.—*PTI*

Indian golfer Aditi misses cut in Cincinnati

CINCINNATI, 16 MAY

Indian golfer Aditi Ashok missed the cut at the Kroger Queen City Championship after carding a second round of 1-over 71. Put alongside her round of 2-over on the first day, her total score was 3-over par after the second round, while the cut was set at 2-over par. Amanda Doherty and Jin Young Ko were joint leaders at the end of the second round. Amanda and Jin Young Ko both carded 4-under 66 on the second day to become joint leaders. The leaders have a total score of 7-under par heading into the weekend.—*PTI*

Satwik-Chirag enter Thailand Open final after thrilling win

Satwik/Chirag bounce back after losing the first game to reach the final -X/BAI_MEDIA

BANGKOK, 16 MAY

A gritty Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty showed nerves of steel as they stormed into the men's doubles final with a riveting three-game win over Malaysia's Goh Sze Fei and Nur Izzuddin at the Thailand Open Super 500 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

World No. 4 Satwik and Chirag, who won the title in 2019 and 2024, displayed remarkable composure under pressure to outclass the world No. 9 Malaysian pair 19-21 22-20 21-16 in a gruelling semi-final that lasted 82 minutes.

It will be their third final appearance at the USD 500,000 tournament and first of the season.

The Indian pair will have to recover from the 82-minute match when they face either Indonesia's Leo Rolly Carnando and Daniel Marthin or China's He Ji Ting and Ren Xiang Yu in the summit clash.

A lucky net cord delayed the inevitable before Chirag put one away to seal a place in the final.

The star Indian pair had recently made headlines for their comments highlighting the lack of mainstream visibility and public appreciation for badminton in India despite the country's Thomas Cup bronze-winning campaign in Denmark.

Satwik and Chirag, however, shut out the outside noise and stayed focused on the task at hand to register their eighth win over the Malaysian combination.

The Indians came into the match with an overwhelming 7-2 head-to-head record against the Malaysians, but Goh and Izzuddin had beaten Satwik and Chirag in front of the home crowd at last year's India Open Super 750.

The Malaysians made a bright start, dominating the front-court battle to lead 3-1, but the Indians quickly caught up with some fine finishing to make it 5-5. —*PTI*

RCB out to seal play-off berth, PBKS to arrest freefall

RCB has maintained consistency throughout the tournament

DHARAMSALA, 16 MAY

Royal Challengers Bengaluru would look to exploit vulnerabilities of a profligate Punjab Kings bowling line-up to seal a play-off berth in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Defending champions, the only team that has maintained consistency throughout the tournament, are clear favourites against Punjab Kings, who are in a freefall, having lost five games in a row after being the most dominant team in the first half of the tournament.

RCB VS PBKS @ HP Cricket Association Stadium, Dharamshala

3.30 pm IST

In the only day game scheduled at the scenic Dharamsala stadium, the top draw without an iota of doubt is Virat Kohli, fresh off a hundred in the previous game.

A sizeable number of fans have already made their way up to the mountains from Delhi and Punjab to see the larger than life Kohli bat in the breathtaking backdrop of the Dhauladhar range. The limited infrastructure in place in the city is pushed to its limits.

While RCB are sitting comfortably on the points table, a sixth loss for Punjab Kings would effectively shut the playoff door on the Shreyas Iyer-led side.

20-30 per cent increase in IPL media rights won't be surprising: Mohit

Punjab Kings co-owner Mohit Burman believes the recent winning bids for two IPL franchises worth billions of dollars will have a positive impact on the next media rights cycle, and an increase of 20-30 per cent will not surprise him.

The existing media rights cycle from 2023-2027 fetched an eye-popping Rs 48000 crore (roughly USD 6.2 billion as per the exchange rate back then). —*PTI*

Can Starc stop Vaibhav in crucial IPL 2026 clash?

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's audacious strokeplay will come up against seam-and-swing master Mitchell Starc as Rajasthan Royals and Delhi Capitals lock horns in a high-stakes IPL "Sunday Suspense" clash with playoff hopes hanging by a thread.

But amid this hype, the subplot that will intrigue one and all would be how Starc can stop a marauding Sooryavanshi, who has hit 40 sixes in 11 games while scoring 440 runs at a stunning strike-rate of 236.55.

While DC's qualification chances (10 points from 12 games) are already slim, a defeat would officially knock them out of the playoff race.

For the Royals (12 points from 11 games), the week-long break is expected to have rejuvenated the squad. They would not want DC to play party poopers and allow Punjab Kings (13 points from 12 games) to breathe easy. No teenager since the genius Sachin Tendulkar has captured the public imagination quite like the schoolboy from Samastipur in Bihar, who already boasts a sizeable fan base.

His 'Capital Debut' at the Ferozeshah Kotla is no less than the cricketing equivalent of a 'Met Gala' with the who's who of NCR clamouring for free passes. —*PTI*

Mohsin Naqvi invited for ICC board meeting

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi could travel to Ahmedabad later this month for the ICC's scheduled Board meetings, which coincide with the IPL 2026 final at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Reports indicate Naqvi has also been invited to attend the IPL final, although a final decision on the visit is expected to rest with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The meetings were initially planned in Doha earlier this year before being shifted to India because of the geopolitical situation in West Asia. The ICC's Chief Executives' Committee is scheduled to meet virtually on 21 May, before in-person Board meetings on 30 and 31 May in Ahmedabad. —*ANI*

Afghanistan Series: Focus on Bumrah's workload

NEW DELHI, 16 MAY

Jasprit Bumrah will either play the one-off Test or the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan next month as the national selection committee is keeping an eye on the pace spearhead's workload while naming the squads for the series on May 19.

The one-off Test, which isn't a part of the World Test Championship cycle, will be played at New Chandigarh from June 6-10, while the three ODIs will be held on June 14 (Dharamsala), 17 (Lucknow), and 20 (Chennai) respectively.

The bilateral ODIs have gained traction because that is the only format in which Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma play internationally.

However, Delhi speedster Prince Yadav's name will certainly be discussed by the selection committee, considering his stellar show in the last edition of the national one-day championship. Prince took 17 wickets from 8 Vijay Hazare Trophy games.

Besides that, his effort in the ongoing IPL 2026, 16 wickets from 12 games, including the dismissal of Virat Kohli with a lovely seaming delivery, has underlined the fact that there couldn't be a better series to try out Prince, since Harshit Rana is unlikely to get fit anytime soon. —*PTI*

-PTI

Litton Das century rescues Bangladesh after Pakistan's early blows

SYLHET, 16 MAY

When it finally settled, a day that ebbed and flowed belonged to Litton Das. A majestic hundred from Bangladesh's wicket-keeper-batter lifted his side from the oblivion of 116 for 6 to 278. Khurram Shahzad and Mohammad Abbas had torn through Bangladesh's top and middle order, but as it happens so frequently, Pakistan failed to deliver the knockout blow, allowing Bangladesh to wriggle out of trouble once more. By the end of the day, the visitors will have been relieved to see off six overs in the evening without damage after the final session handed Bangladesh momentum that was all Pakistan's in the first two. Litton was a man on an ambitious mission from the moment he walked out, and saw two more teammates fall inside ten runs to leave him batting alongside the tail. He immediately began turning down singles, aware he would have to do much of the work himself.

Pakistan 21 for 0 (Awais 13*, Fazal 8*) trail Bangladesh 278 (Litton 126, Shanto 29, Shahzad 4-81, Abbas 3-45) by 257 runs. —*PTI*

Asian Weightlifting C'ships: India's medal haul rises to four as Sanjana claims bronze

GANDHINAGAR, 16 MAY

-X/@SAIMEDIA

Sanjana added a fourth medal to India's tally at the Asian Weightlifting Championships, clinching bronze in the women's 77kg category here on Saturday.

Sanjana registered a total lift of 220kg (96kg in snatch and 124kg in clean and jerk) to finish third in a four-lifter field.

China's Guifang Liao won the gold medal with a combined effort of 265kg (118kg+147kg), while North Korea's Kyong Ryong Kim claimed silver with a total of 260kg (115kg+145kg).

With her podium finish, Sanjana joined Komal Kohar (48kg), Gyaneshwari Yadav (53kg), and Ajith Narayana (71kg), all of whom have won bronze medals for India at the ongoing continental championships.

In the women's 86kg category, the other Indian in action, Vanshita Verma, finished fourth with a total lift of 220kg. She managed 95kg in snatch and 125kg in clean and jerk.

China's Cuiting Peng secured the gold medal with a total lift of 270kg. Bahrain's Alina Marushchak took silver with 265kg, while South Korea's Hyeonju Jang claimed bronze after lifting 245kg. —*PTI*

KEEGAN SMITH WINS K'TAKA OPEN

BENGALURU, 16 MAY

Top seed Keegan Smith capped off a dominant week, defeating fourth seed Philip Sekulic to lift the men's singles title in the Karnataka Open here on Saturday.

American Smith registered a 6-2, 7-5 win.

Earlier, the Indian duo of Niki Kaliyanda Poonacha and Saketh Myneni claimed the men's doubles crown with a convincing 6-2, 6-3 victory over Petr Bar Biryukov and Grigoriy Lomakin.

The singles final began with an early twist as Smith dropped serve in the third game, handing Sekulic an advantage. —*PTI*

FIFA FINALLY SEALS RIGHTS

WC broadcast deal in China at just $60M

GENEVA, 16 MAY

FIFA finally sealed a World Cup broadcast rights deal for China on Friday, just 27 days before the opening game and at a much lower reported price than the soccer body wanted.

The overall agreement with China Media Group covered the next four World Cups — two each of the men's and women's — through 2031, FIFA said in a statement. It includes the 48-team, 104-game men's tournament in North America, starting on June 11, which China did not qualify for.

Chinese state-affiliated media reported on Friday that the 2026 World Cup rights were valued at $60 million. FIFA originally sought $300 million, Chinese media reported in recent weeks, as the deadline to strike a deal drew closer.A rights deal for India has not been confirmed.

"It's a real pleasure that we have found an agreement with CMG," FIFA secretary general Mattias Grafström said in the soccer body's statement. He was in China this week, also for meetings with officials from the Chinese soccer federation.

FIFA's leverage in China was less because of the time difference of up to 15 hours from Beijing to the 16 host cities spread across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Chinese companies have already made a big investment in the 2026 World Cup, which is set to earn FIFA more than $11 billion.

Technology firm Lenovo is one of FIFA's eight top-tier sponsor partners, and second-tier deals were signed by dairy firm Mengniu and electronics manufacturer Hisense.

Chinese conglomerate Wanda signed a long-term deal with FIFA in 2016, which was terminated two years ago.

The value of the TV rights was not disclosed for the 2030 World Cup, which once might have been hosted by China and which Wanda said was part of its strategy with FIFA. The country's ambitions to host international soccer competitions stalled during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2030 men's tournament will be mostly hosted in Spain, Portugal, and Morocco, with single games currently scheduled to be played in Argentina, Paraguay, and the original 1930 World Cup host, Uruguay. —*AGENCIES*

Aston Villa clinch Champions League spot

BIRMINGHAM, 16 MAY

Aston Villa secured Champions League football with a 4-2 win over Liverpool on Friday night that leaves the Reds still at risk of missing out on Europe's elite competition next season.

"Champions League, this is something amazing," said Emery. "To compete in both competitions and be consistent is not easy. We had a fantastic season in the Premier League, and I am so proud."Liverpool slip to fifth and remain just four points ahead of Bournemouth, who have two games remaining.

Even if the Reds do limp over the line to Champions League qualification, the manner of another dismal defeat raised fresh questions over Arne Slot's future.Ollie Watkins celebrates with teammates after scoring their third goal during the English Premier League football match between Aston Villa and Liverpool at Villa Park in Birmingham

The Liverpool boss has remained confident he will be in charge next season despite a desperately disappointing title defence. —*PTI*